

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE YOUNG MAN

D. H. LAWRENCE

COLERIDGE AND S T C

*Edited by Stephen Potter*

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MINNOW AMONG TRITONS Mrs. Coleridge's Letters

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# THE MUSE IN CHAINS

A STUDY IN EDUCATION

BY

STEPHEN POTTER



Pauvre Muse, deschirée et vilainée d'opinions  
phantasques, qui te liberera de la prison de  
l'impudente ignorance où l'on te tient enfermée.

JEAN AILLEVARD

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## DEDICATION

IN THE BELIEF THAT ENGLISH LITERATURE IS  
THE BEST OF ALL SUBJECTS FOR EDUCATION,  
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO ITS STUDENTS



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S. P.

# THE MUSE IN CHAINS



# I

## ENG. LIT.

### DESCRIPTION

A FAMILIAR world, still flourishing at the outward parts, but dying at the centre, is passing. The time has come to preserve its likeness, to describe its features for posterity. This world, which revolves round editions of, histories of, talk about, and biographies of the authors of, English Literature, is the centre of many activities. Newspapers have been founded to cater for it; there are journalists who live by pushing in articles on Cobbett, or the Discordant Marriage of the Carlyles: plays are written round its more Dickensian characters and themes: a book on the Hardy Country would till very recently go to ten thousand: Chaucer's *Prologue* is quoted in silly season leaders: charabanc trips to Dove Cottage are regular in holiday programmes: Gray's *Elegy* is broadcast with the Stoke Poges churchbells as effects: the postman who meets me as I catch the last post says 'And so to bed -'.

But now, there is a change. The waters are sinking. The arcane source is drying up. History demands, Science demands, that before it disappears altogether, some record of Lit must be preserved.

*Naming the Nameless*

The thing of which I write has long been an element of our life: indeed, it is already past its bloom. Yet because it has never been realised, or even accepted, it is nameless. No one speaks of it. There are no books about it. Its amateurs, its professional men, have no title; its journals, its executive, its official associations, are anonymous. Yet its influence is wide. It gives object to much of the superfluous and uncanalised energies of modern life. It gives dignified professions to good-class intellects, pleasure and interest to the bored, life-forgetfulness to the unhappy old: it can even feed the different enthusiasms of the young. Yet in spite of ostensible connections with the most articulate, it is unchristened.

What it is *not* is English Literature, though hanging as close to this as a shadow to its substance. But because it is this attendant shadow, I will invent a shadow name, a not very affectionate nickname, and (on the analogy of Lit. Hum.) call it eng. lit., or, phonetically, INGLIT, or – one word – Lit.

*First Definition*

Defining 'Lit' is not easier for those who have long breathed its air – like myself, who have been in touch ever since I passed the 'Books and Characters' question in the English Literature paper of London Matriculation with the help of my epigrammatic couplet:

Major Dobbin, Becky Sharp, in *Vanity*  
Not S. Johnson's *Human Wishes Vanity*.

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The nearer one is to the heart of the foggy material, the more difficult it is to see it. Those who are already in the thing will I believe instantly recognise and salute the phrases on the dust-cover of this book. When I say 'Lit' I am comprehensively conscious of worn-out old stumps of sentences mixed with names I seem never not to have known – like 'Skeat . . . Elia . . . Massinger . . . Dove Cottage.' 'Willing suspension of disbelief . . . killed in a tavern brawl . . . strong mystical vein . . . later period' mixed up with 'Folio . . . 'Tis Pity . . . without o'erflowing, full . . . *sic*,' etc. But the layman, the man who concerns himself with English Literature rather than with this shadow, will need some kind of definition. Lit, I begin –

Eng. Lit. is an example of the interpretation of the greater by the lesser: of great English writers by anecdotalists, antiquarians, hero-worshippers, pedants, and collectors.

### *First Description*

No. This definition will not do. It is inadequate – even misleading. It leaves out of account the most important element – the fog, the pervasiveness. For this is an attitude rather than an act, a tone of voice rather than a method of treatment: an attitude for which there is I think one adjective which is fitting – external. But it is better to try to describe than to define.

There are many sub-departments. Nay, says the reader, it is itself a sub-department of the history of

criticism, of æsthetics, of bibliography. The reader has not yet objectively contemplated this thing. It has its own sub-departments, very different from these. It has its own psychology, standards of value, ethic: its own histories.

### *The Order of Merit*

Its standards of value are based on an absolute distinction between geniuses (*a*) and non-geniuses (*b*). Growing up with Lit, one grows up with the axiom that there are certain unapproachable creatures, the Great Writers. Their names are ranked, like tennis stars, in one unalterable order of merit. *Shakespeare*, No. 1 . . . Long pause then *Milton* and *Wordsworth* bracketed second, closely followed by *Chaucer* (4) *Keats* (5) *Spenser* (6). Then first 'prose' writers, because 'poetry' always of course ranks before 'prose': Bacon and Swift. Then Shelley. Then *if* and only *if* it is agreed that they have been dead long enough – for it is another unquestioned axiom that it is impossible to 'assess,' even mention, writers who have published within living memory – *if* they may be allowed, place here Carlyle and Browning. Or place them, at any rate, next after Pope and Cowley. And then – why not? – a novelist. But the dead-decency test is rather more rigid for novelists. At any rate the thirteenth place has always been reserved for Fielding. After 13 the order is a little less rigid. But right up to number 65 (Crabbe) the absolute hierarchy is maintained. On one side stand the English authors, phenomenal and separate: on

## DESCRIPTION

the other side stand us. To us, only one kind of writing is open. We can be critics; it is taken for granted that any of us can be critics. But so far as poetry or creation is concerned, it is our lot to look on.

### *Dramatis Personæ*

This *voyeur* attitude, wherein the great ones are biographed, columnised and chatted about like film stars, leaderised and centenarised, gives birth to the Lit Psychology. Since the power of creative writing is regarded as a gift, bestowed at birth by a fairy god-mother, the creative part of the author is outside the realm of analysis or profitable discussion. There is however something else besides the producing of works which may be contemplated. This is *human side*; and it is the discussion of this, the elaboration of this, which is the basis of Lit psychology. Readers like to see that after all the great are 'not so very different' from themselves. But curiously, it is not the traits of sensitive apprehension, powers of experiencing and knowing, which they like to find analogies of in themselves. It is a common *human weakness* they settle on. No. 12 was unsuccessful in his domestic life: No. 16 rewrote his letters before publication so that he himself should appear in a more favourable light: No. 35 was contemptibly sycophantic in his dedications: No. 60 took drugs. Human weakness and human strength as well – but never beyond the all-too-human. For the rest, there are the familiar personalities of Lit, the famous old familiar figures. The Lit public has each his

favourite Character from these ranks, before whose altar he warms himself, seeing in the traits for which his favourite is most famous, richer expressions of more tentative traits in himself. Thus Johnson is the idealisation of their own after-dinner wisdom: <sup>1</sup> Carlyle their own crabbed unsociability seen as eccentric genius: Byron their desperate, anti-social good-man-gone-bitter selves: Wordsworth themselves admiring the view: Coleridge themselves smoking too many cigarettes: Pope themselves in a moment of mercilessly nimble satire: Addison and endless essayists their smilingly thoughtful selves: and Charles Lamb, of course, *themselves*, human, humorous, admirer of poets yet no poet: critic yet sympathetic understander of human nature as well.

### *The Histories*

In the field of criticism, this absolute division between writers and readers is paralleled by an equally hard-and-fast distinction between writers and their work. Since the product of creation, the poem, is regarded as supernaturally inspired, as anti-human, then it seems natural to take it for granted, since the poem has drifted down among us from nobody knows where, that it can be studied as a detached phenomenon. As if it were a meteorite, it is measured and weighed, called epoid if its shape is long, couploid if its edges are even. Any notion that it is some kind of extension of its author is suppressed. Conscious that this is a little unfair, the critic will

<sup>1</sup> A thought recently elaborated by David Garnett in the *N. S. & N.*

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say things like, 'It is impossible not to feel that in the lines where he describes the "white-backed flicker of the leaf" the poet had in mind the willows along the banks of that Ouse he loved so well.' True *that* sort of connection is made very often, a map connection, and often a date connection, but the main joining stalk is completely severed.

Hence follows the most characteristic product of this world, the 'histories of English Literature.' Everybody knows these histories. At the beginning of his career Professor Raleigh had to complain that there were not enough. We were much worse off in this respect, he said, than France. But the words were hardly out of his mouth when the histories were on us. Warton's had belonged to the dark beginnings. Stopford Brooke's was too slight for us to feel its weight. The outburst came from the histories we Lit men know so well, from Saintsbury, Legouis, Elton. From Cambridge. They have had wide sales and express the essence of the subject. They are written with an ease and confidence which might seem astonishing when it is remembered that opposites as violent as Keats and Dryden, Vaughan and Wycherley, Blake and Sprat (of the Royal Society) have to be brought into one volume. But the stranger to this world is forgetting that all these men are subdividable into sections possessing two invincibly common denominators - (1) Literary type and (2) date. Thus, glancing through the chapter headings we see 'The English Lyricists' . . . 'Fall of the Epic' . . . 'Heyday of the Picaresque Novel' . . . 'Decay

of the Pamphlet of Discontent' . . . 'Death of the Sonnet' . . . 'Middle period of the Novel of Passion.' The subordination of these histories to the other, to the date category, is famous even to laymen. 'The nineteenth century,' 'the eighteenth century,' etc., are concepts familiar already, because borrowed from the history books of our youth, which record events by layers, regarding eternity, like Coleridge's Archbishop Leighton, as a baron of beef or quarter of lamb, off which time can be cut in slices. Curious examples of this habit are seen in thesis writers who take the *books published in any one decade* for their theme. In Elton, whose great history is divided into 1730-80, part one: 1780-1830, part two, etc. In Gosse, who maintained that Waller, not Milton, 'revolutionised poetry in England' *because he was born three years earlier*. In Saintsbury, who so often says things like '1750 to 1780 was particularly thin in the secular lyric' and who so frequently admonished his readers to 'remember the date.' 'Remember how early he lived before you dispraise,' or 'remember how late - he ought to have been much better.' Collins, he says, might have been better than Coleridge *if the date of his birth had been 1820 instead of 1720*. In Legouis the personal element is confined to a footnote with lists of dates in the life of the author. This method is preferable to the stereotyped biography-phrase usually attached to each famous man of letters:

'The tribe of Ben.

Marlowe, killed in a tavern brawl.

Pope, 'lispd in numbers for the numbers came.'

## DESCRIPTION

But in all these histories literature is discussed as an organism, with the nineteenth-century evolution ideology well to the fore. Whether or not the facts warrant it, a growth and progress is described, and a genealogy. Half the space is devoted to influences, not of one man on another, but of one literary form on another, so that Shakespeare, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, etc., are a link in the genealogical table of drama, with ancestors Terence, Seneca, Miracle Plays, Morris dances, and May games; offspring Jacobean drama; and grandchild Comedy of Manners. And in case there arrives an author who can be categorised neither under date nor literary type there is always subject matter to fall back on. Arriving at the nineteenth century, Professor Logie Robertson might have hesitated. Even his courageous heart might have quailed a little at the profound heterogeneity of this panorama of creators, phantasts, intellectualists, humorists, story-tellers, pioneers and imitators. But the practised historian does not hesitate an instant. 'The subject of nineteenth-century poetry,' he begins, 'is pretty equally divided between nature and man.' For the moment, we will remember this phrase as motto for the Inglit. histories.

### *Lambinator*

With all their trick of ignoring the fact that books have at one time in their existence flowed from the end of a human arm, with all their power of attenuating authors to attendant spirits, wispily minis-

tering round the edges of the solid body of Literature, these historians give a clear picture of at least one man, themselves. The categorist, the simplifier, the coverer-of-ground-for-the-sake-of-covering-the-ground, is a type – we may call it Type I of the Lit Man. But no preliminary description of my theme would be complete without mention of the equally common Types II and III.

Type II I call Lambinatory, or Elia-type. Lambination has little to do with the original and stimulating founder of the dynasty, Charles Lamb. It springs from the influence of Lamb's *way* of writing, bad only because all such influences are bad. The Lambinator does not write literary histories – he is scornful of them. He is scornful of all painstaking work, because he is the idler with the pipe. So far from concentrating on literary forms, he rather ignores the discussion of writings, and goes in tremendously for the human side, which he understands perfectly because he is so tremendously human himself. He contemplates, he understands, and however many apparent examples there may be of the fact that genius can be fervent, sensuous, violent, hating, there is always the implication that the real writing, the real good, is the Lamby kind of writing, his own kind of writing, in which quietness, contemplation, and humour dashed with sadness and a touch of Ah-the-Past is the thing. His qualification for writing about these subjects is an implied learning, a suggestion that he is soaked in the *minutiæ* of his subject (so that his knowledge of the

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great famous things is taken for granted). And he expresses this knowledge by the inverted comma attitude. He is allusive. Is not Lamb allusive – and many others high up on the list? Is not Keats allusive in his letters? 'In my book,' says Whitman, 'there will be no reference to other books, poems, authors': nevertheless it is one of the fundamental concepts of Lit that it is good to be allusive. So that the reader has an uneasy feeling that every other line contains a phrase too famous for quote marks, and that he himself has blundered into a cultural circle of old friends in which he is a hopeless outsider. Ben Jonson is called 'Ben,' Donne is 'Jack Donne,' Jane Austen (on account of some private joke into which he cannot join) is Miss Austen, and there will be references to such mysteries as 'Miss Prue,' 'Dorothy's pin-money,' 'Jonathan Swift's M.D.,' or 'Sam' Rogers' glass coach, which will come so readily to the tongue that one has to long in private for the offices of *Inglit*. Type III to explain it all.

### *Note-Man*

Type III may be called the note-man or surface creeper – much looked down on by the Lambinator, who, more essentially *Littish*, admires exclusively the man of action. Nevertheless, the link between the two types is strong. No. 2 goes in for small external observations on his author's character, No. 3 for small external observations on his work.

Coleridge describes him thus:

He passes over a poem as one of those tiniest of tiny

night-flies runs over a leaf, casting its shadow, three times as long as itself, yet only just shading one, or at most two letters at a time.

Allusively, I think of Browning's old book, which he had fished out of the hollow of a tree trunk:

How did he like it when the live creatures  
 Tickled and toused and browsed him all over,  
 And worm, slug, eft, with serious features,  
 Came in, each one, for his right of trover?  
 – When the water-beetle with great blind deaf face  
 Made of her eggs the stately deposit . . .

The Lambinator directs many thoughtful smiles against these takers of pains.

Our first experience of these notes is for most of us the last. Years later, we pick up by chance our school copies of *Paradise Lost I and II*, or *Julius Caesar*. Here and there are blots long gazed at, absent-mindedly, in the past, and even now faintly remembered. Our signature, strangely large-lettered and rounded. Faces drawn in the margin, all in profile, all looking to the left. A corner torn off, to cut away a rude drawing. Our address (complete to 'Eastern Hemisphere'). Most of the text, most of the notes, underscored or ringed for forgotten reasons. There will be a powerful stirring up of reminiscences. 'Edited by A. W. Verity, M.A.,' will recall the smell of the fireproof preparation in the corridors: 'Blackie's Library of the Classics,' the chalk-powdered cigarette scorches on a master's gown: 'Of man's first disobedience and the fruit' – that will set

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you thinking of the feel of the gritty boards against bare feet in the changing room.

Indeed, because the notes in this book were adapted for boys, and *Paradise Lost* itself was written for men made calm and dignified by long experience, the notes are the more concrete memory of the two.

It is scarcely this kind of edition which can be called essentially Lit. The work of the true note-man is to be found in the grander editions of scholarship. Here are the characteristic elements such as collation, cross-reference, etc.

When I think of notes in general I think of myself reading a phrase such as that of Hamlet's:

that was to him  
Hyperion to a Satyr

and then . . . my eye dropping down the page, with uncontrollable compulsion, to pick out from the thickness of type at the bottom the words:

‘Satyr’ refers, of course, to the cloven-footed *satyri* of Greek mythology . . .

For children such explanations are necessary, although it is a strange fact that if one first learns about Hyperion or Lethe or Pelion from the footnote one never ‘knows’ it: the fact becomes perhaps permanently imbedded, but lies inert. I carry still, unabsorbed in my mental digestive tract, a ‘Shirt of Nessus,’ a ‘Fabian tactics,’ and a ‘Nestor.’ In the higher, scholarship edition, the explanation is there,

but its presence has to be justified by extra knowledgeable additions. The word is explained parenthetically, in the course of an argument, of a Lilliputian bit of research, even of a microscopic quarrel with a fellow-editor, thus:

Satyr (the cloven-footed, etc.) is here mentioned by Shakespeare for the first time. Or the last time. Or for the only time. Or note how frequently he uses it. Obviously had he not been recently reading Sandys' translation of the *Memorabilia* (which also contains frequently the word 'Satyr'). I would tend to place the first edition of that translation considerably earlier than did Professor Felixstowe in his *Sandys – the Canon*.

It is the same with the explanations of the meanings of words. One is not given merely the explanation, but the argument as well:

I am surprised that so experienced a scholar as Dr. Bell should impute to Kyd's use of the word a meaning and indeed an accentuation which surely belonged exclusively to the East Anglian dialect – unless the researches of T. E. Copp are nothing but meaningless nonsense.

### *Notes on Shakespeare*

The Lit note proper, of course, belongs to this higher sphere. As I go on collecting my great anthology of Notes on Shakespeare, I find myself no nearer an answer to the tremendous question which has been the background to my research, namely: What notes are Good or bad Why.

I have made some surprising discoveries, however, and of these the chief is that the best Lit notes are

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found in the most recent editions, particularly in one well-known edition, not for schools, not Verity, but standard for Universities. The examples I now quote (not invent) will explain themselves.

### 1. *Research.*

(a)

[*Midsummer Night's Dream*

HERMIA:

You and I

Upon faint primrose beds were wont to lie.]

'Faint' is here, I think, an epithet of colour, hardly of smell.

[*Cymbeline*

Under these windows, white and azure, laced

With blue of heaven's own tint.]

. . . the eyelids are white with azure veins. I understand 'laced with' to be an expansion of 'azure,' cf. IV, 2,222, 'The azured harebell, like thy veins.' Malone took 'white and azure' to refer to the eyes, the 'unclosed lights'; others understand these words as referring to the general hue of the eyelids, and 'laced,' etc., to the veins. Vaughan writes: 'The ancient *window* was primarily the fence to exclude wind, and this fence excluded light because it was opaque.' Warburton read: 'These windows: white and azure laced, The blue.' For 'laced' meaning diversified with streaks of colour, cf. *Romeo and Juliet*, III, v, 8. Perhaps Staunton's 'white and azure laced' is right.

(b)

[*Antony and Cleopatra.*

CHARMIAN (*to the soothsayer*): Good now, some excellent fortune! Let me be married to three kings in a forenoon, and widow them all: let me have a child at fifty,

to whom Herod of Jewry may do homage. . . . I love long life better than figs.]

*Child at fifty.*

On this jesting wish of Charmian to be one of very few mothers, Steevens observes: 'This is one of Shakespeare's natural touches. Few circumstances are more flattering to the fair sex than breeding at an advanced period of life.'

(c) *Verbicide.*

[*Midsummer Night's Dream.*

QUINCE: A lover, that kills himself most gallant for love.]

Probably this is nothing more than an example of Shakespeare's free use of adjectives for adverbs.

[QUINCE: What say'st thou, bully Bottom?]

*bully* . . . the Dutch *boel* . . . a term of endearment and familiarity, originally applied to either sex, sweet-heart, darling. Later, to men only, implying friendly admiration; good friend, fine fellow, 'gallant.' Often prefixed as a sort of title to the name or designation of the person addressed. . . .

If the dictionary atmosphere of phrases like 'a sort of title' and 'fine fellow' has quenched our smile at Quince's pride in hob-nobbing with the great, another kind of smile may be raised by note-type 2, the detective note, often used for plays of uneven merit to prove certain passages to be or not to be 'really by Shakespeare.' See editions of *Macbeth passim*. E.g.

2. *Detection.*

*Macbeth*, I, 2.

Enter a bleeding sergeant.

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As final proof that the scene is not by Shakespeare, the editors suggest:

We may add that Shakespeare's good sense would hardly have tolerated the absurdity of sending a severely wounded soldier to carry the news of victory.

3. *Putting it Better.* Here the editor takes comfort in the sound of his voice, and explains the obvious for the sake of turning it into a Johnsonian sentence—like the editor of Quince quoted above, who would like thus to 'explain' Bottom even when Bottom is being inexplicable on purpose, but who manages to confine himself to the well turned:

It is idle to try and convert intentional nonsense into sense.

An example from a note on Chaucer, the Pardoner's description of himself preaching:

And Est and West upon the peple I bekke,  
As dooth a dowve sittynge on a berne.

The allusion is to the nodding motion of the head of the domestic pigeon.

4. *Making it Interesting.* This is for the editor who goes in for everything thoroughly. 'Most interesting,' he seems to say, as with nose brushing the paper, he makes his explorations with specimen case in hand and classified list of species in his pocket, e.g.

(a)  
[*King Lear*, IV, iv, 7.

Crowned with rank fumiter and furrow-weeds,  
With hor-docks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers. . . .]

*Note in Arden edition.*

*Hor-docks.* 'I print "hor-docks," the Q. form, which is clearly the same word as the Folio Hardocke, i.e. probably the hoar or white dock. The *N.E.D.*, following a suggestion of R. Prior in his *Popular Names of British Plants*, 1879, p. 102, explains Hardock (also hordock, hardoke) as "some coarse weedy plant, probably burdock" (*Arctium lappa*). This idea is described by Professor Skeat (Introduction to *Fitzherbert's Husbandry*, 1534, ed. 1882, p. xxx) as "a wild guess that should be rejected." He notes that Fitzherbert includes hauddodes among a list of weeds in the corn, p. 39. This Professor Skeat pronounces to be corn-bluebottle; Fitzherbert describes it, p. 301, as 'a blue flower with a few little leaves.' Only for its ugly name this might be Shakespeare's word here. Wright found in a MS. Herbal 'Hardhake' as a name for Knapweed, and Turner, in his *Names of Herbes*, 1548, gives the name Hardewes for the wild succory *Sichorium intybus*).

(b)

[*Midsummer Night's Dream.*

And I serve the fairy queen,  
To dew her orbs upon the green:]

orbs . . . generally called 'fairy rings' and supposed to be created by the growth of a species of fungus, *Agaricus Orcades*, Linn. These circles are usually from four to eight feet broad, and from six to twelve feet in diameter, and are more prominently marked in summer than in winter. . . . But see Mr. Sidney Turner (*British Medical Journal*, 28th July, 1894) who considers the 'so-called "fairy rings" were produced by the better and more vigorous growth of the grass, owing to the excess of nitrogen afforded by the fungi, which composed the ring of the previous year. . . .'

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5. *Seeing Things*. Sometimes the editor stares so long at his text that shapes and meanings begin to appear where nothing is. Or else it is that he longs to be the first to plant his flag on lines hitherto unclaimed for Noting. He begins to 'see things,' and the following kind of note is the result:

(a) At the start of the play (where the notes often fall much more thickly than later on) the editor, out of sheer appetite for his task, seems to be resolving to break all records for moneysworth in the way of explanation of the utterly clear. Cf. the note on this, the very first line, of *Henry IV*, Part 2.

[*L. Bard*. Who keeps the gate here, ho!]

*Who . . . here, ho!* 'Who' is here, I think, the indefinite (i.e. 'He who'), and not the interrogative pronoun, as is implied, for instance, by the punctuation, 'Who keeps the gate here? Ho!' (*Oxford Shakespeare*), and 'Who keeps the gate here, ho?' (*Cambridge Shakespeare*). 'Who keeps the gate' is a periphrasis (i.e. 'Porter') of a kind usual in calling to servants or others, in attendance but out of sight. Cf. 2 *Henry VI*, I, iv, 82: '*York . . . Who's within there, ho! Enter a Serving Man*' (*Oxford Shakespeare*); *Henry VIII*, V, ii, 2, 3: '*Cran. . . Ho! Who waits there!*' ('there?' *Oxford Shakespeare*). '*Enter Keeper*'; Massinger, *The Roman Actor*, III, ii: '*Iphis . . . I must not . . . knock. . . Within there, ho! something divine come forth . . . [Enter Latinus as a Porter]*'; Jonson, *Every Man in His Humour*, IV, viii; R. Steele, *The Funeral* (1701), II, iii: '*Fardingle*. No — who waits there — pray bring my lute out of the next room. *Enter Servant, with a Lute.*' In *Henry VIII*, V, iii, 4, the 'Keeper at the door' is doubtful whether Norfolk's question, 'Who waits there?' is or

is not the conventional call to the Doorkeeper, viz. 'Who waits there?': 'Nor. Who waits there? . . .'  
And so on for another inch.

(b) In words.

[*Cymbeline*, I, vi, 36.

. . . the twinn'd stones  
Upon the number'd beach.]

*number'd* . . . 'numerous,' i.e. with stones. . . . Farmer conjectured 'umber'd' (shaded), Staunton 'cumber'd,' Vaughan 'encumber'd,' and other inferior suggestions are made. Is the fancy too far-fetched that the beach is 'number'd' because sung to in 'numbers' (numerous verse) by the waves?

(b) In characters.

[BASTARD: James Gurney, wilt thou give us leave awhile?  
GURNEY: Good leave, good Philip.

BASTARD: Philip! Sparrow! James,  
There's toys abroad: anon I'll tell thee more.  
(*Exit Gurney.*)]

Coleridge's note:

For an instance of Shakespeare's power *in minimis*, I generally quote James Gurney's character in 'King John.' How individual and comical he is with the four words allowed to his dramatic life!

H. N. Coleridge's note to Coleridge's note:

The very *Exit Gurney* is a stroke of James's character.

6. A, B, C.

[This foul Egyptian has betrayed me . . .  
Triple-turn'd whore]

*triple turn'd*. This refers, of course, to the three infidelities of Cleopatra (a) to Julius Cæsar for Pompey, (b) to Pompey for Antony, (c) to Antony for Octavius.

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The usual argument against notes is that they are distracting; and although it is natural to ask, here, is not the reader free to choose whether he uses a text with notes or without, the argument is not so absurd as it sounds. The *Lit* note *is* distracting – for the paradoxical reason that it tries so hard not to be. There is now a Lit ideal of editorial detachment, very strange when one remembers the passionate glosses of the great commentators – of Johnson and Coleridge. Yet these great note makers did not, with all their first-person ubiquity, distract the reader away from, they concentrated him on to, the meaning of the text. Now the Lit editor is always trying to keep himself in the background. He will not presume to criticise: he will regard his obligations as discharged if he has spent months of heavy labour over the punctuation, the cross-references, and the verbal meaning of lines which have only taken days to write.

This is distracting, because such notes, written in the library tempo, form an inappropriate frame for the different tempo of the poet: is distracting because it is very difficult not to stare at somebody very hard at work – whether text mending or road mending.

### *Strands of the Ing. Lit. Net*

These illustrations will help to explain my theme, and will remind the reader how wide have been the powers, the associations, the connections amateur and professional of this sub-culture. We are only just emerging from a period when IngLit has filled our

reading life. Future historians may be drawn to analyse the allotment of space in our intellectual weeklies. They will find that a report on an advance in ray therapy may or may not get a bare mention. A new book by an eminent French political scientist will be lucky to get a single sentence. A good novel will get a paragraph, will get its due. But a new edition of Mason's letters to Thomas Gray's old nurse will get the top reviewers, and a good twelve hundred of well-spaced large pica of attention. What, however, I believe that the general reader would like to realise is that the whole subject has tied itself into so inextricable a knot that except for the numerous class who are able to dismiss the whole thing as fake and unsusceptible to organised study, Lit is the reverse of stimulating, is an annoyance, is the fertile cause of dispiriting preconceptions. I propose to untie the knot by finding the beginning of its strands, tracing the convolutions of their history. The tangle which so far I have been trying to separate seems to be made up of

1. The desire of the creative writer, with spontaneous impulse towards self-expression, to know more of the mechanics of writing, in order that he may pass himself to his reader as freely as possible.

2. The fastening of critics, who are not themselves writers, on this same subject, the mechanics of writing, and their treatment of it as if the instrument were the end. Their innocence of the motives of creative writers.

3. The growing up of the impression among

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'book-lovers' – a fairly good word for those who are subdued into trance-like receptivity, rather than stimulated to activity, by the contact of genius – that they are all of them perfectly competent critics, but that real 'creative' writing is impossible for them unless they are flukily presented at birth with something vague, something supernatural, called 'genius.'

4. The canonisation of the accepted writers, not by the criterion of their power of self-expression, but by their approximation to the public notion of eminence, which confines the name 'genius' to writers who have consistently displayed some well marked and not unlovable character – to those for instance who are Johnsonish or Lambish or Byronish or Browningish.

5. The fostering of the belief that there is a permanent order of 'great writers' – such as those painted on gold round the dome of the British Museum reading room – whose high rank is absolute.

Before I attempt the history of the tangling, I will suggest one further definition:

Ing. Lit. is the study of the externals of English Literature, from plots to punctuation, in which the educative function of literature, its unique power of expressing, with every degree of directness, absolute difference in men, and the subtle processes by which these differences are achieved, is lost sight of. As substitute for the great writers themselves, and their '*über*'-humanity, place is given to waxwork imitations, 'characters,' human

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types, in whom no inconsistency is recognised, and whose lives are recorded, whether they have achieved a real life, an active self-development, or not, in the same terms of anecdotal incident.

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### *Lit is Born*

Born and bred to English books and writing, for me there was no question, when I went to Oxford, what my Subject would be. Innocent of such ideas as the possible greater pertinency, for the embryo critic or poet or whatever I believed myself, of Modern Languages, Classics, or History, I sailed straight into the school of English Language and Literature.

Not without great pleasurable excitement of anticipation. At eighteen my abnormally unprecocious reading had brought me just beyond Kipling, Marryat, and Dickens to a new verge – to *Evan Harrington*, and the fact that it was possible to record and make interesting subtleties of motive which I was beginning to be conscious of in myself, which I might some day write about myself: or to *Man and Superman*, and *The Way of All Flesh*, and to the discovery that literature could start a train of tremendous thoughts. And I was well on with Keats and Shakespeare. I was well into my first poetry shock. Never to be forgotten, the phrases that first made themselves heard:

sunburnt mirth

He stood in the wars like a great seamark.

Once the pleasure of such a phrase as 'sunburnt mirth' is realised, the appetite begins to grow at a tearing pace. To be about to *have to study* such a subject, to have as a set book not Livy Bk. 11, with forcing schoolmaster pushing your nose into it, but to be allowed, by a fellow scholar – for that seemed as if it might be the atmosphere – to make your own studies, with his help, of Shakespeare plays, real ones (i.e. no school-draggled *Julius Caesar*), and when all this was to be carried on under the auspices of Professor Raleigh, and 'D.N.S.', of whose contrasted warm and cool I had heard . . .

It may have been the fault of my tutor. The late T. S. had knowledge, wit, and could himself write well. Those initials in the *D.N.B.* always stand beneath a good article. But he seemed to have been rendered cynical, even desperate, ever since his English post at Sandhurst, where he had not found superable the difficulties of convincing Sandhurst cadets that Lit themes, such as the origin of the Comedy of Humours, or the rise of the Petrarchan sonnet, were as interesting as the works of the new Lewis gun or the development of the R.F.C. Or it may have been my own schoolboy oafishness. Perhaps I did not realise the prolonged mechanical effort always necessary just after the first excitement in a new subject was quenched. I was certainly excited at first, even by '1579.' 1579, I was told, was the first date one ought to remember.

1579, the outsider must know, is the date of the most important English translation of a classic, of

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the first Puritan pamphlet against the stage, of a First Important Critical Essay, and . . . '1579.' Here was a new '1066,' of a heavenly interest, instead of deathly school-fact. Above all (last bit of information), it was in that year that Spenser's first poem, the *Shepherd's Calendar*, appeared. In short, *I was to read*, or rather (pleasant university distinction) it was 'suggested' that I should read, this poem.

Suggested! I had always known the name of Spenser. Knew that he was 'great poet,' ancient, romantic; and the one line of his I knew – 'A gentle knight was pricking on the plain' – lovely. Here was I about to read his first poem, work of a young great poet, known, I knew, as the poet's poet. Well, I was a poet, or someday to be one. I must half unconsciously have been reserving my first reading of Spenser for this moment. When I sat down with my new, unannotated, Oxford complete Spenser, happy anticipation was complete. Here was to be the pristine poetic essence, the first, the most naive, and therefore the purest examples of 'sunburnt mirths.'

My disappointment was complete. It may be that this is a unique experience, but for me, nothing I have read has been more near irrevocably damping to my poetic appetite. Instead of breath-taking images, there was smooth poetistical language. Instead of apprehensions of nature (making me see something as if for the first time), there was talk of *oaten stop*, and the shepherds' *fleecy care*. Instead of naïveté and idealism, confident force (my conception, then, of what a young poet's poetry was likely

to possess) there was careful imitation, use of classics chosen from models for which I still had a schoolboy antipathy. I began to read praise of Spenser, to see where my blindness lay. All concentrated on the 'melody of line.' True there was melody of line, – I knew more certainly that there was 'music' in the *Faerie Queene*: but just at that time I happened to be discovering, through gramophone records, Beethoven's quartets, and as music, Spenser did not stand up to the comparison. Finally, too, there was the dispiriting apparatus of notes.

This infantile experience of the *Shepherd's Calendar* had so retrograde an effect on my English studies I think, simply because of this phrase the 'poet's poet.' I began to think that I myself must be incurably prosaic, half-dead. For I did not then realise, what I realise so clearly now, that Spenser, whether or not he is the poet's poet (he is admittedly Cowley's and Keats's) is more certainly the poet of Lit; and how this comes about, and how Lit seemed to make so early a start thus in our Literature, I now offer to explain.

The first great shape, the primary organisation in the morphology of Lit is the sandwich. The first thing one is told is that there are two romantic periods separated by a classical period. Elizabethan the romantic, 1660 to 1760 the classic, then Romantic again, officially starting with 1798 (*Lyrical Ballads*) and lasting down to times altogether too close to be judged or even spoken about. Whatever

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the apologies which may be nowadays made for the words 'Romantic' and 'Classic' (it is forty minutes of a lecture to explain that the terms are misleading, need definition, should be reversed, are useful, are dangerous) – yet still, whatever the layers are called, the great Sandwich stands firm. Romantic . . . Classic . . . Romantic.

Whether or not a general vogue for old-ballad-old-ruin is more congenial an atmosphere for potential creative genius than a vogue for eclog-and-couplet is a question altogether too pertinent to the true history of English writing for us to be concerned with. But however this may be, it is taken for granted:

1. That something called 'romanticism' is the only possible soil for creative writing.
2. That the Elizabethan period was romanticist.
3. That the Elizabethan period was a time of free, spacious, and creative writing.

Whatever the validity of the Sandwich, students of the Elizabethan age soon get a very different impression. For all its great exceptions, its Marlowe, its Shakespeare, its Peele, the general run of Elizabethan writers seem to show qualities which are distinctly the reverse of the buccaneering audacious poetical freedom with which they are usually credited; qualities which seem to the inexperienced not unlike those of the Lit world itself. Here are pamphlets and letters – about metre, or diction. Here are a surprisingly vigorous race of antiquarians, not at all exclusively engaged in the study of

the ancient glories of England, nor free from a taste for minute details and lists. There is more than one such sixteenth-century catalogue – astonishing fact – of English writers, embryonic Lit historiography, drawn up by Bayle, and by Leyland. The teachers of rhetoric and grammar thrive. And the literary men themselves seem all of them to be discussing style and devices, interrupting their poetry, like Polonius, to point out with thin enthusiasm that ‘mobled,’ or whatever it is, is a very good word. The ‘metre ballad mongers’ must have set on edge the nerves of more men of action than Shakespeare.

What is the cause of this old head on young shoulders? Too far-fetched, perhaps, the suggestion that so far as the antiquarians are concerned the literal scattering to the winds of ancient records which followed the Reformation and the disbanding of the monasteries made a race of researchers necessary. But it is certainly true to say that the Reformation affected our literature in a more important way; that it made a break in the developing stream of our national art which severed for ever all connection with its pristine stage of myth and legend; that it caused English Literature to be separated from its own native epic origin, its Heroic Age, a division all the more difficult to mend because our older literature had never been powerful enough to leave a permanent mark on the country, a country which had for ever passed beyond its influence now that the rapid changes to which the English language is subject had left Old English and even

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Middle English so far behind that they were no longer comprehensible.

But still, it might be said, what excuse was there for the average Elizabethan writer not to maintain from the first the merits natural to English writing, now that these new native merits had re-appeared in Chaucer? The reason here again is the unlucky break <sup>1</sup> – the comparative deafness and dumbness of the unhappy fifteenth century in England, which caused Chaucer to be not forgotten, but, because of his archaism, to be misunderstood. He was marvelous, they thought, *for his time*. And not quite knowing how to appreciate him, they praised him for his learning. Thus Sidney:

Of Chaucer, truely I know not, whether to mervaille more, either that he in that mistie time could see so clearly, or that we in this cleare age, walke so stumblyngly after him. Yet had he great wants. . . .

Harvey praised him for his extraordinary knowledge of 'astronomy':

Saepe miratus sum, Chaucerum, et Lidgatum tantos fuisse in diebus illis astronomos.

Lastly, there is the peculiar nature of England's connection with the Renascence to be remembered.

England accepted the Renascence with such grateful eagerness. But so far as her literature was concerned, its influence was not entirely healthy. For one thing, England, unlike France, had not at first a literature of her own against which to measure

<sup>1</sup> But contrast the opinion of Dr. Chambers, quoted on p. 240.

the value of the new writing. For another, it was a late, a very jaded wave of the revival which reached us. We did not receive the great classics virgin; we received them edited and pawed by two hundred years of Italian scholarship: they landed, commentaries and all, with merits and demerits and all critical points worked out for us.<sup>1</sup> No wonder that our first favourites from among the classical authors were ill chosen. No wonder that we were affected by the spirit of annotation at least as strongly as by the spirit of a new art.

The result on English literature has been summarised by Professor Renwick in his book on Spenser. He shows how the chief distinguishing mark of the new poetry was the reasoned critical basis which was immediately perceptible, and how the aim of this criticism was never the expression of a personal taste but always a question of 'How is it done? How does it work? To what 'kind' of literature does such and such a way of writing belong.'

Spenser, handed to young Lit students as the poet's poet, is typical of the Elizabethan case. He has famous and fascinating merits, including the celebrated dairy-freshness so opposed to this other character, this *Shepherd's Calendar* self: he taught style to a generation of poets fearfully in need of that

<sup>1</sup> Renwick: ' . . . the freshness of the adventure had worn off. To a scholar of the time of Petrarch it was a high endeavour to attempt the recreation of the Virgilian epic and the Ciceronian dialogue, he could feel the inspiration of belonging to the mighty company of the ancients. By the sixteenth century the thing had been done about as well as might be.'

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instrument. But at school, from Mulcaster, and from his reading, he had to inherit 'a mass of theory and comment, and with it the habit of it.' He would be taught to examine works of poets under the headings 'Invention,' 'Disposition,' etc. He would be taught to concentrate on device and detail. Especially, as is famous, he was interested in diction, studying the theories of Ronsard. He made deliberate use of more or less archaic words. But unlike the Pleiade, he had no notion of upholding the native tradition when he did this. It was a question of taste, of 'art.' Of littishness, almost. Spenser, whose work I have delighted in, I cannot believe to be the Poet's Poet. With the true Maker, one is conscious that words are being used, filled with a new kind of life. Spenser did not use, but was used by, words. Reading him, one sometimes agrees with Ben Jonson (for which one poet, at any rate, Spenser was not the man) that Spenser 'writ no language.' He is the poet of Lit.

I often like to compare Shakespeare here. Shakespeare wrote his own *Shepherd's Calendar* – *Love's Labour's Lost*. Like Spenser he discusses there, directly or indirectly, by way of parody, by satire, or by his own unconscious exemplification of them, all the language controversies of his time. But with the end of the play he has finished with these things for good, and he emphasises this reform with Berowne's renunciation of 'Taffata phrases, silken tearmes precise, Three-pil'd Hyperboles, spruce affection, Figures pedantical' in favour of 'russet yeas,

and honest kersie noes.' Then, right at the end, after the wit talk has died down, after the fantasticated semi-Euphuism of Armado, the courtiers' voguishness, the pedantry of Holofernes and the pseudorusticity of Costard, come the two songs – 'When Daises pied, and Violets blew,' and

When Isicles hang by the wall,  
And Dicke the Sheepheard blowes his naile

– those songs which make every reader feel: Here is the first real Shakespeare. The play is not over even yet. There are two more lines, the two last lines in the play:

ARMADO: The Words of Mercurie are harsh after the  
songs of Apollo: You that way; we this way.

'You that way' might have been said to Spenser. From now on, for Shakespeare, the songs of Apollo.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Re-reading these lines I am reminded that there is another way of accounting for the youthful Lit student's distaste for Spenser, less youthfully critical. In Spenser, the discovery of the past was not a re-discovery, as it was in the eighteenth century, but something new. Consciousness of a historical past was in the sixteenth century an exciting acquisition, and the antiquarian studies of men like Bayle and Leland must be judged from that standpoint. To go back to the past was the act of the creative imagination, not, as in the eighteenth century, of the genteelly luxuriating fancy. But how could a young Lit student make this distinction, reading Spenser for the first time? Another poem of Spenser's I was set to read was the *Daphnarda*. In self-defence, I will quote Mr. Renwick on this poem. [The style of this poem] 'is the result of *contaminatio* of pastoral, allegory, and mediæval symbolism – of Virgil and Chaucer – and though the double imitation is typical of Spenser and his dual allegiance, it is not a very happy result . . . attempting to compensate with ingenuity of craftsmanship for lack of feeling.'

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### *The Rise of Nostalgic Reading*

For all its early start, Lit lapsed somewhat in the seventeenth century. The age of the birth of the scientific attitude was unsympathetic. However nostalgically Browne, Burton and Walton – the writers who in the Lit world stand for ‘seventeenth century’ – may now be read, for themselves and for their age they were pioneers of scientific research, and the famous ‘style,’ on which we now concentrate, was incidental only to the record of observations. ‘Fine style’ is generally condemned by the Restoration’s Royal Society. Sprat, its President, was explicit:

Eloquence ought to be banished out of all civil societies, as a thing fatal to peace and good manners . . .

The Royal Society passed a resolution to reject ‘swellings of style’ in favour of a ‘close, naked, natural way of speaking . . . preferring the language of artisans, countrymen and merchants before that of wits and scholars.’ No littish ‘back to the peasant’ here, but a command to re-connect language with life.<sup>1</sup>

Earlier in the century, that other great Lit pursuit, luxuriating in the Past, is attacked by Ben Jonson:

And as it is fit to read the best authors to youth first, so let them be of the openest and clearest – Sidney before

<sup>1</sup> The irrational Locke objects that ‘all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby the judgments; and so, indeed, are perfect cheats’

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Donne. And beware of letting them taste Gower or Chaucer at first, lest, *falling too much in love with antiquity* and not apprehending the weight, they grow rough and barren in language only. When their right judgments are firm and out of danger, let them read both the old and the new.

And however exclusively Sir Thomas Browne may now be studied for the fascinations of his archaism, his own century was very free from this kind of self-indulgence. Chaucer was read and appreciated – but not for his ancientness. Indeed Dryden permanently scandalised the world of Lit by showing that he appreciated quite different qualities in the *Canterbury Tales*, turning his back on all the fascinating quaintnesses and composing a modern version, in which it is quite true to say that much of Chaucer is lost, but quite untrue to suggest (as it always is of modernised re-writings) that because the archaism is not meticulously preserved, Dryden (who has written as well on Chaucer as anybody) shows himself brutally insensitive to the true value of his subject. In the same way, at Oxford, at Queen's, there was developing, at the end of this century, a first collective enthusiasm for the study of the 'Saxon' language – of the very earliest English literature, that is – by students whose chief interest in it was not a curio-hunter's interest, nor even a grammarian's, but who read it because they wanted to know what it was about, who caused old English to be read for the first (and some will say for the last) time, for the subject.

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The age of Ah-the-Past is the eighteenth century, and it is quite misleading to think of this as any kind of 'return to sixteenth century antiquarianism.' These early explorers, from Bayle and Leland to Burton and Browne, to Langbaine even, were not attracted by the nostalgic, 'olde' fascinations of their subjects. They were real pioneers, of imagination and courage, revealing good in the barbarously neglected. The same is true of many of the eighteenth century excavators, of the motive behind Dodsley's collection of old plays, for instance; and no accusation of 'perioditis' could be made against Pope, who objected to the new tendency with some impatience, complaining that now

Heads of houses beastly Skelton quote,

though he persuaded Spence to bring out an edition of Gorboduc.<sup>1</sup> Nor of course am I referring to the early eighteenth century's famous passion for the Augustans. No archaism, here, for them, but a miraculously clarifying statement of the consciousness they themselves were moved to express. The eighteenth century loved the Augustans for their modernity. The real littish 'return to the past' comes later.

In 1707 was published a book which ought to be famous or notorious as a landmark. It was volume one (it ran to a volume two) of a monthly miscellany, *The Muses Mercury*, and it contains, on page

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted here to Mr. Nichol Smith's Lectures on English Studies.

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134 of the British Museum copy, a printing, in black letter, of

THE NUT-BROWN MAID  
A POEM, near 300 Years Old.

The poem is preceded by a sketch emphasising the strange agedness of English poetry, and a discussion of the undoubted venerability of this particular poem:

It is known to most people conversant with Books, and Bookish Men, that the late Samuel Pepys, Esq., who was so long Secretary to the Admiralty, made a Collection of all the Ballads that he could procure, from Chevy Chase to T - m D - y's. At the Head of this Collection was this poem . . . [which was found] Printed in a very Antient Book, one of the first that was printed in England . . . [the poem] is said, by the Publishers of that Miscellany, to be old even in his time, the Reign of *Edward* the IV<sup>th</sup>; and, supposing it was the Middle of his Reign, it must be printed about the Year 1472. Now a Poem could not properly be call'd *Old* unless 60 or 70 Years, and that brings it to the Time. . . .

Here, surely, does *Old* or 'Olde' begin, a first tiny outpost of the army of Revivals which came marching in such force in the later part of the century. The publishing of groups of ballads, which culminates in Percy's collection, the popularity of Celtic epics, the revival of Spenser, the editions of the older English poets, which began to dribble from the presses and then to flow: the anthologies and selections which began to flow and then to pour: the Hurds, the Horace Walpoles, the Chattertons. Soon

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even the new great young men begin to be swept along in the tide until they have time to collect their senses. Only a Dr. Johnson can stand against the flood. A Coleridge staggers. A Walter Scott is marked for life. With the dawn of the nineteenth century Ah-the-Past has built itself on permanently to Lit. England has become Old England. English Literature begins to be Old English Literature.

### *Determining the Order of Merit*

‘Criticism of the great by the small’ – this was part of my definition of Lit. To understand the habits of this criticism, it is necessary to understand its theory of value.

I would call it G.C.M. criticism. First note that since one of its most indissoluble categories divides writers into (a) Creators and (b) Critics, the critical credentials of a writer who is in no sense a creator are never questioned. From the first, this *voyeur* criticism took the following shape. Because he ‘agrees’ with them – i.e. because he understands them – intelligent observer A. chooses from the various Principles elucidatable from the creators those of B., and applies them to the work of C., D., F., etc., pointing out where the writings of these men differ from the ‘rules’ – i.e. the principles latent or explicit in the work of creative writer B., and of course only valid for this B. Results are arrived at, in fact, by judging one writer by standards only valid for another, by a process, necessarily, of lessening, of reduction of C., D., F. to an L.C.M. or at best to a G.C.M., to

some quality which they all happen to hold jointly with creator B.

G.C.M. criticism is not only early but constant in Lit, though like *Ah-the-Past* it lapses somewhat in the seventeenth century. It began to flourish even before the days of the *Shepherd's Calendar*. Criticism seemed so suddenly and completely natural from about 1560 onwards that the whole new attitude, deeply contrasted as it is with the centuries before – with their obedience, their taking for granted – seems as if it must come from something deeper than fashion or education. No doubt the Reformation is responsible: for the courageously perky criticism of the great by the small has gone on ever since. The England volume of Saintsbury's history of criticism, which lumps together creators like Coleridge and Carlyle with minor professors and journalists, shows how steady the stream is, and how suddenly it begins.

Does one of these critics embody their characteristics more than another? I am trying to trace down the origin of that Ranking for which they are responsible, that Hierarchy, that elevation to a Peerage of fixed merit, to a Reputation handed down without diminution from generation to generation. In the case of the Elizabethans, men like Wilson, Cheke, Ascham and Puttenham enumerate principles merely (they make simplifications, or trifling extensions, of Aristotelian categories) without much application of them to the acknowledged writers. For the great, at first, there is praise – the criticism of the open-mouthed stare, which Lit men do not

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regard as negative, begins. The species is not seen at its best and most effective till Dryden, in whose age classical standards, generally Aristotelian, are applied to the Elizabethan dramatists, and the G.C.M. process is seen in full swing with the praising of Shakespeare only for what he possesses in common with the authors of antiquity. This G.C.M. age is called in the manual the 'Age of Criticism,' 1660 to 1760. Its accepted master is Dryden – suitably so because he is far the best English writer to create no world, no quality, no values of his own: because there has never been an author who knew so much about the mechanics of writing, was so delicately sensitive to the art, had such a poet's apprehension of the structure of prose, and yet who gave so little new meaning to the world. I have a painful reminiscence of Dryden criticism. My manhood sapped by answering Lit questions for the week of my Final Schools, I was in no state to face the *Viva*. I only wanted to placate, to ingratiate, to plead, to admit defeat but gain support by the deep respect which my nervousness, I hoped, would make clear. As a result of this worm-like attitude (actually, I now know, the examiners like confidence – even a touch of Dare-devil Dick) I was vivaed rather sadistically. In my Restoration-Period paper I had written:

Everyone must know by heart the unforgettable words in which Dryden praises Shakespeare.

It was Mr. Brett Smith, I believe – or it may have

been Mr. Percy Simpson – who asked me if I would mind repeating the words myself. Of course I could not. I tried, but the only words of Dryden I could remember were a couplet from a ‘dedication’ of Rochester’s translation of the *Memorabilia*:

Now will sweet Ovid’s ghost be pleased to hear  
His fame augmented by an English peer.

‘Could you tell us to which words you are referring, Mr. Potter?’

But I could only think of the couplet, and seemed not to be able at that moment to remember even the drift of Dryden’s point. For in fact deliberate memorising is needed for such sentences, however perfect the phrase; critics like Dryden evolve no standards for their readers gradually to absorb: it is with them a matter of opinion, *pro* or *con*.

The natural result of G.C.M. criticism is that those authors who are richest in the right common denominators are considered the greatest: are for ever and absolutely Good. With the criticism, the order of merit arises.

Not at once: because for one reason, the lits never pass judgment on writers alive in their own lifetime. They ‘wait for the verdict of posterity,’ taking it for granted that this is more ‘right’ than the judgment of contemporaries.

When was it finally decided how the leading places were to be filled? It is not of much help to go to the literary histories, because of their paucity in these early times. A clue is obtainable, however, from

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a study of the way in which these histories evolved. In France a treatise on French poetry had appeared as early as 1581, but there were no such histories in England till Thomas Warton's history of poetry published in the seventeen seventies. Even so it is not so much on Warton that the later Lit histories we all know have been parasitic as on some of the notions of writers before his time.<sup>1</sup> The *Theatrum Poetarum* produced by Milton's nephew, Edward Phillips, in 1675 is not much more than an encyclopædic dictionary. But in 1691 a book was published which belongs almost to Lit Mythology, a book handed down from scribe to scribe, as it were, recited round Lit camp fires; a book which should be on permanent exhibition for all Lit students to visit and gaze at through glass, instead of being producible, as it is, on casual enquiry in the North Library of the British Museum. It is Gerard Langbaine's *An Account of the English Dramatic Poets*, Oxford, 1691. It is the careful and interesting criticism and fact collected by a pioneer antiquarian and clever writer – but this is not the point. There are four copies of this book in the British Museum, listed as follows.

No. 1 'with MS. notes.'

No. 2 'with copious MS. notes.'

No. 3 'with copious MS. notes by W. Oldys.'

No. 4 'with notes by R. Wright and J. Haslewood, and copious transcriptions by J. Haslewood of MS. notes by Oldys, Percy, Steevens, Reed, and Park.'

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted, in these paragraphs, to Mr. Nichol Smith's Lectures on English Studies.

The book is an epitome of the way Lit fact and criticism are evolved. Ingenious men of research like Oldys, ferreters out of interesting detail, stick their contribution on to a framework evolved by some one else. It is in this way that not only fact but criticism, not only criticism but fundamental category are handed down and re-handed. Note that the particular preoccupation of Langbaine perpetuated a habit, for subserviency to which Lit is very often reviled – ‘Sources’-chasing. Langbaine speaks of Shakespeare’s ‘borrowings’ (‘beholding to Cynthio Giraldi for his Plots . . . likewise a Scene in Henry the Fifth, written in French’). He speaks at great length of the borrowings of Dryden: ‘So that had our Author stollen from others, in none of his Labours, yet these Plays alone argue him guilty of the highest confidence, that durst presume to arraign the Ancient English Poets as Plagiaries, in a Postscript to two Plays, whose Foundation and Language are in a great measure stollen from the Beginning to the End.’ In these pristine times ‘Sources’ were called ‘borrowings,’ scarcely disguised euphemism for ‘stealings.’ Langbaine would not have approved of Picasso:

On doit prendre son bien où on le trouve, sauf dans ses propres œuvres. J’ai horreur de me copier, mais je n’hésite pas, lorsqu’on me montre par exemple un carton de dessins anciens, à y prendre tout ce que je veux.

One of the last writers to suffer from moral disapprobation on this strange score was Coleridge.

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Another ingrained habit of Lit histories (not a habit of Warton's) was inherited apparently from Dryden. The arranging of writers into 'Schools.' He talked of Milton as the 'poetical son' of Spenser . . . 'for we have our Descents and Clans . . . Spenser more than once insinuates that the Soul of Chaucer was transfus'd into his Body . . . ' Gray expanded this in his letter to Warton which the *Gentleman's Magazine* thought worth printing in their fifty-third volume (p. 100). He talks of the School of Provence. Of the First, Second and Third Italian Schools (second Italian is the original of 'lord Surrey, Sir T. Wyat, Bryan, lord Vaulx'). And 'my idea,' Gray says, 'was in some measure taken from a scribbled paper of Pope.' Dryden . . . Pope . . . Gray . . . . . Jones's Intermediate English Literature Course for the Higher Forms.

But the order of merit? For the sake of comparison with the safe average judgment of official Literaries, compare a list which one day when he was writing a letter Byron believed in. Although so different from posterity's (i.e. ours), it is obviously a perfectly 'true' one.

Scott . . . is undoubtedly the Monarch of Parnassus, and the most *English* of bards. I should place Rogers next in the living list (I value him more as the last of the *best* school) – Moore and Campbell both *third* – Southey and Wordsworth and Coleridge – the rest, *οἱ πολλοί*, thus: –

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W. SCOTT

ROGERS

MOORE — CAMPBELL

SOUTHEY — WORDSWORTH — COLERIDGE

THE MANY

There was an absolute order before Byron, but only just before. It was only at the end of the eighteenth century that Shakespeare attained to constant, unquestioned, and (as it seems now) permanent first place. After Shakespeare's death Beaumont and Fletcher, Milton, and Pope were each at times officially considered his superior. Even Byron regarded Pope as the greatest English writer: but then he was in no sense an Eng. Lit. man. By the end of the eighteenth century the first two places had certainly been filled. Shakespeare was No. 1, Milton No. 2. But the later places changed hands quite often. An interesting late eighteenth-century ranking of poets from Cowley to Gray can be very roughly assessed from the relative amount of space Johnson thought them worthy of in his *Lives of the Poets*. Johnson certainly made an attempt to keep

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proportion, except of course in the life of Savage, which was out of the series, both in time and motive. Omitting Savage, the order of the leaders, and the number of pages devoted to them, is:

Pope	123
Dryden	90
Milton	76
Addison	54
Cowley	51
Young	45
Waller	42
Swift	36
Smith	21
Blackmore	17
J. Phillips	13
Gray	12
Thomson	12

(There are 37 others.) It is easy to see how this partial order differs from the final one, from that of our modern *Encyclopædia Britannica*, for instance, which can be taken as a standard. Note in Johnson's order the relative places of Pope and Milton, Addison and Thomson; the high place of Blackmore, the absence of Lady Winchelsea.

When did the final order arise?

A year's not very profitable work on reputations would be necessary before this could be proved. But I have just spent forty minutes in a very pretty piece of research, on just the kind of tabular-graphical line which should, I think, appeal to modern scientific lit students. It was in one of the farthest and deepest cellars of the British Museum – half of

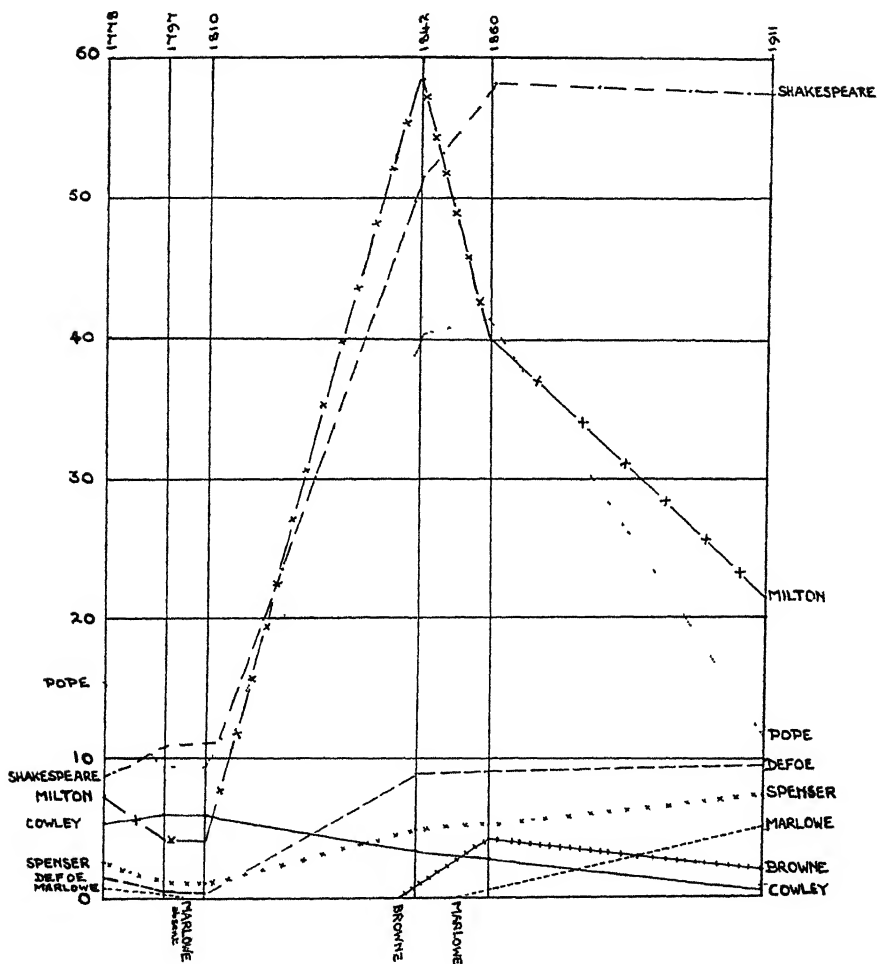
the time was taken up in the journey there and back, feeling my way among the toads and bats. It consisted in looking up the earliest editions of the *Britannica*, and comparing the length of the entries under half a dozen names, chosen more or less at random from the upper thirty of the hierarchy, to trace any fluctuations in the gradual settling down to the final order.

The result of this research – a graph (opposite). The dates along the top represent editions of the *Britannica*, from the second to the eleventh. The graph lines represent the amount of space, *proportionately to the varying size of the editions*, given in each edition to the authors named on the left, the standard being the number of volumes in the 1911 edition of 28 volumes. E.g. the 1778 edition contained ten volumes only, but I have multiplied the number of columns up to the 1911 standard of size. The first edition does not appear. It was utilitarian only, and contains no names of writers.

Note:

1. The lateness of the date of Shakespeare's accession to first place; and his unapproachability, once established.
2. The steep rise of Lit excitement following well in the wake of the Romantic Revival writers.
3. The small absolute, and vast relative decline of such a writer as Cowley – a decline which dates from 1700.
4. The implication that popular taste follows far, far in the rear of pioneer taste. The reaction against the eighteenth-century's subordination to Milton and

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Pope was only driven fully home under the auspices of Arnold, in the 'fifties.

5. The delayed acceptance of the 'low' Defoe.
6. Early indifference to Marlowe, and complete neglect of Sir Thomas Browne.

*Qualification.* To be successful, candidates for top rank must possess certain qualifications. Ability to write counts in the candidates' favour, certainly: but this is only a fraction of the necessary qualification. For instance, there is a strong Lit morality, which plays an important part. It is not demanded of candidates that they should be 'religious.' Religious writing is definitely a disqualification, unless it is the most superficial kind of Robinson Crusoe moralising. Any real attempt to express God, any writing of seriously attempted integrity, of self-knowledge, is a mark against. The journals of George Fox have never been given even a mention in any manual: Bunyan's autobiography is allowed, but only by virtue of the Christmas Supplement kind of piety of the allegory of *Pilgrim's Progress*, which Lit (never having fathomed the allegory beneath the allegory) approves for its simplicity: the Blake prophecies are dismissed and the religious creations of Coleridge, never read, are judged by his titles, and dismissed as 'aids to reflection.'

Another qualification is the possession of a clearly cut character. A very few obvious traits are sufficient, if they are of the right sort. Herrick, by virtue of twenty poems, is joined on with the 'Cavalier Love Lyrists,' sweet and charming. If his collected

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works seem to present something different, it makes no matter. They are a 'pity,' or 'later work' or a 'sick man's fancies.' Shelley comes in under 'lofty idealist,' 'compact of spirit.' If his life cannot be reconciled with the adolescent's picture of such a type, his life is irrelevant. Coleridge is a 'Poet' (No. 2 to Wordsworth, eighth on the whole list). Yet he spent three-quarters of his life busying himself with the problems of consciousness, of motive, of will. A pity – what a pity. Lit deprecates. It was Germany that did it. Irrelevant to the 'true Coleridge, who was a poet.' Incontrovertibly so – for doesn't the story of how *Kubla Khan* came to him out of the air accord with the best notions of poetic inspiration, with its strong hint of fine frenzy, and a hidden voice? The fixity of these characters is partly due to the arbitrary way in which they are bestowed – they very often follow the first firmly stated criticism by the first articulate contemporary. But Lit-men had their own reason for keeping these pictures intact. As has been suggested already, these characters – the kindly, shrewd, Johnson wiseman, the kindly emancipating poet Shelley, the brusquely sane and yet romantic Browning, etc., are turned into idealised selves by the readers who favour them, who feel that their own corresponding traits need enriching, or dignifying, or making more kindly.

Another characteristic, which perhaps gains the highest mark, the possession of which is indeed essential for inclusion in the big twenty of Eng. Lit., may be called 'knowledge of the heart.' In practice,

this means that absolute preference is given to writers who concentrate successfully on human traits and types, who describe the psychological detail of the world to the reader as the reader knows it already. Jane Austen, Addison, Goldsmith for instance, thus qualify for an enormously high place.

To sum up, the chief requirements are: (1) clearly marked character of a more or less lovable or interesting or picturesque type, (2) an ethic of vaguely Christian type, (3) knowledge-of-the-heart.

It is easy to see how difficult it is to fit certain indisputable geniuses under this head, geniuses who must certainly come in the first twenty, if not the first five. Milton, for instance, or Blake.

Blake, even more emphatically than Milton, is not in any sense 'humanish.' His character, beyond the fact that it has certain acknowledged and creditable links with genius and inspiration, has the dimmest of outlines. And marks for knowledge of the heart are very low indeed. Yet in his work there is one exception to these unpromising limitations. He wrote 'Little child, who made thee?' and a few other poems of similar type and metre, among which can just be placed, by an awkward stretch, 'Tiger, Tiger, burning bright.' Poems about animals, since most of them are simple humanisations, usually count as knowledge-of-the-heart. True this poem happens to be superbly *beyond* anthropomorphism, but since a Tiger is an animal, it just passes. Of course the 'little child' poems are more than right. So are thoughts on imprisoned linnets. But Blake cannot for

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these alone possibly be put in the first five: not even in the first twenty-five. There is much too much of strong mystical vein, visionary work, and other pities. He is placed rather low, therefore: but an awkward situation is saved by admitting that his place is 'unique.' Thus from a typical history:

The mingled simplicity, fieriness, and the strange lyrical melody and mysticism, of the poet-artist William Blake, gives him a unique place . . . the great feature of Blake's poetry is his infinitely tender love for children and animals, and his hatred of cruelty: his expression recalls the style of Herrick and the lyrical utterance of Shakespeare.

### *The Lit Shakespeare*

Conversely, it is easy to see how precisely Shakespeare fits the ideal: how on all counts, for all moods of everybody, he must be for ever such an absolute No. 1 without rival. There is an unquestioned tradition that he was a good man – nice, kind and charming: vaguely Christian. There is nothing of mysticism in his work, so unpopular in Lit. He was a poet of exactly the right kind in the songs – pure 'magic' poems like these are the kind of literature which this world gets nearest to a true appreciation of. And of course he is the greatest of all knowledge-of-the-heart men. Moreover, he is a perfect subject for two kinds of Detailer. The mystery of his comparatively unrecorded life is a constant invitation to ferreters-out of biographical date and fact; and the text of his plays really has needed

an editorial microscope for the explanation of obscurities.

Because this attention has been so unmitigating, the activity of which I am writing, the treatment of the great by the small, can be seen most clearly in Lit's treatment of Shakespeare. The Editors form a powerful organisation. Ninety per cent of the obscure passages were explained by the end of the eighteenth century, yet in the nineteenth the busyness of editors was quadrupled. After Coleridge a new mine was opened. Coleridge had created a new Shakespeare, explorer of personality, conscious of absolute difference in man. This showed the way to a new kind of detail, and Shakespeare was Eng. Litt'd into an observer of minute psychological traits, and ex-editors of the test started on a new and exciting human trait hunt. It marks a kind of advance, certainly, on the eighteenth-century critics who found Shakespeare a mine of eighteenth-century morality, and anthologised him under such headings as DISCONTENT . . . DOUBT . . . DUELLING . . . FORTITUDE . . . OPPORTUNITY (there is a tide in the affairs of men). But all the time there is the sense of the objective treatment of a phenomenon, non-geniuses quite happy so long as they can busy themselves somewhere within the sun of genius, priests going through the ritual of worship on the outskirts of the high altar, though perhaps muttering to each other while they are on their knees, rather cheekily and irreverently, in an undertone. For Shakespeare, of course, has been made the symbol

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of the uncriticisable, the unapproachable. Already by the end of the seventeen-sixties earlier criticism, on the score of his lack of learning, of his violation of the rules of Aristotle, of his use of puns, of his being a rough diamond, had melted away before the first great wave of Lit idolatry. Shakespeare's Mulberry tree was cut down and carved into small expensive pieces. The pilgrims began to gather, the poet was becoming the god, the god was changing into the idol.<sup>1</sup>

*Variorum Furness.* All these characteristics are gathered together in that great monument of Lit, its Bible, Furness's *Variorum* edition of Shakespeare. Every Lit man is familiar with these volumes, once light cocoa, now faded, most of them, to museum khaki, but with the binding, in buckram rough as the ox-tongue leaf, as strong a fortification as ever. As befits a Bible, its leaves are a printer's triumph. Lippincott's had to fit into every page about an inch and a half – often much less – of text, plus an average of three quarters of an inch of textual variants, plus seven inches of double-columned notes; all three, of course, in sharply contrasted type. It is pleasurable. Resting on the carpet of the variants,

<sup>1</sup> These eulogies are most impressive from the mouth of a serious critic, Maurice Morgann, writing in 1777: 'When the hand of time shall have brushed off his present Editors and Commentators, and when the very name of Voltaire, and even the memory of the language in which he has written, shall be no more, the *Apalachian Mountains*, the banks of the Ohio, and the plain of Sciola shall resound with the accents of the barbarian.' For further examples see R. W. Babcock's fascinating *Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry, 1766-1799*. University of North Carolina Press.

strongly foundationed by the columned notes, folded between the Introduction on one side and layer after layer of Appendix on the other, the text itself, spaciouly leaded, really does glow, really does look pearly in its oyster. If we cannot be moved to creation by Shakespeare, here see how we Lit men can slave for him, type-set for him, undermine libraries for him, reading a thousand books in his service. Some sympathetic biographer should Stracheyfy the great editor. His life has the necessary kind of material.

But before I come to Furness, a word must be said of the *History of Lit Notes* which preceded his edition.

Notes on English classics<sup>1</sup> began superbly in the sixteenth century, with welcome explanations by 'E.K.' of difficult words and new ideas in Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*. These may have been by Spenser himself, annotating himself. At the end of the century the explanations in Speght's Chaucer, and even his talk of 'literary debts,' served an equally necessary purpose. The next type of note to arise was the less palpably necessary 'cf.' or 'cp.' type, a kind of annotation naturally brought to life in the editing of Milton. Jortin, commenting on Milton in 1734, cps. and cfs. Virgil, the Psalms, Claudian, Virgil, Ovid, Virgil. In Mark Pattison's version:

<sup>1</sup> See D. Nichol Smith, Paper on Warton's *History* J. W. Mackail, Paper on Bentley's edition of Milton Ants Oras, *Milton's Editors and Commentators from Patrick Hume to Henry John Todd*, University of Tartu, Dorpat, Estonia.

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### *Paradise Lost*, IV.

1. 630. Cp. Horace, Odes, iii, 2, 17.
1. 633. Cp. *Paradise Lost*, ii, 692; v, 710; vi, 156;  
*Rev.* xii. 4.
1. 642. *tempted our attempt*. Keightley claims to have been the first to point out that these plays upon words are imitations of the Paronomasia in Scripture. Cp., etc.

The question whether anyone has ever obeyed the order to 'cp.' is a difficult one to answer, but there is no doubt about the value of the eighteenth-century text-correcting note, based on the necessity of finding out what the great author really did write. Bentley, like Shakespeare's earliest editors, was too superb in his method of cutting out any line which he did not personally take to (including a fifth of the best but least 'classical' passages of *Paradise Lost*). Yet under the later editors – Milton's Todd, Chaucer's Tyrwhitt, Shakespeare's Johnson, Capell, Malone – the text of these greatest writers was ingeniously clarified. In fact, so skilfully had Shakespeare been tended, that by the nineteenth century there was little left to be done, except for eulogists and character analysers like the Cowden Clarkes. But the editors hammered away harder than ever, and later, in the true Lit era, harder still, led on by a new ideal, of impersonality. The Lit 'stand-aside-for-genius.' No preference: no eulogy: no breath of alteration. Almost 'keep out of sight.' But the new editor had to justify himself, and his justification was the display of incredible labours, Machiavellian powers of detection, wisdom superior to his fellows.

Horace Howard Furness (1833-1912) was born into the best kind of enlightened, well established American family. His father was pastor of the first Unitarian church at Philadelphia. Emerson was a friend, a frequent visitor. There was an atmosphere of ardent controversy, on the future of America, on democracy: above all, on the slavery question. The Furnesses were abolitionist in a pro-slavery town. The son grew up in the mould of his father, impressive in appearance, clear voiced, and with lusty powers of work. He saw himself, if not fighting for Abolition, at least as an advocate for just causes, as an upholder of culture, of literature; as an apostle, especially, of the drama. He might, in this last cause, have become an actor. The Shakespeare readings of his neighbour Fanny Kemble had started more than one ambition. But he suffered from an impediment. He was very deaf—so deaf that soldiering, the law, acting, were closed to him. He had to fall back on second best.

The editing of Shakespeare arose very naturally. Listening to Mrs. Kemble, Furness had been overcome by feelings of almost religious reverence. He had the necessary taste for large prolonged tasks, for engulfing labours and cares. When he was only thirteen there appeared a four-page paper of which 'H. H. Furness' was 'Editor, proprietor, publisher, and carrier.' With this kind of bent, it was natural that he should first celebrate his overwhelming admiration of Shakespeare by a childish instinct to create a gloriously enormous scrap-book in his honour.

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As for the time when I began to work over Shakespeare and study him with zeal, it began in '62 or '63 when I made a mighty Variorum *Hamlet*, cutting out the notes of five or six editions, besides the Variorum of 1821, and pasting them on a page with a little rivulet of text. 'Twas a prodigious book, of quarto size, and eight or nine inches thick.

The progress of the Variorum was his real life. Working late – often till two or four in the morning – he presided alone at his desk, on the walls of his library the Commentators, protected from distraction by the barriers of his deafness, working for Shakespeare. There were developments, changes, events. The really great occasion when the first play was completed. The finishing of the two-volume *Hamlet*. There was the gradual collapse of the self-imposed rule of complete impersonality, broken at first only in the prefaces. To begin with, even the great commentators had been sacrosanct; he would use 'only the notes of others, and would utter no faintest chirp of his own.' Then gradually he gained confidence. Tentatively he became critical of some of the later Shakespeare men. 'My resolution did not hold out,' he records, 'and now, ever since I edited Othello, I gabble like a tinker.' Near the end, he even took a kind of liberty with the text itself, modernising the spelling, breaking his rule of *litera-tim* first folio reprint.

This step he regretted, but it is obvious that as time went on he began to doubt the values of the editorial world, became tired of the minuteness, the

pedantry, the fuss about nothing. 'I do not wonder,' he writes to a friend, 'that you prefer the plain simple text. My Variorum . . . is a downright evil, but a very necessary one, to keep scholars from threshing old straw.' Sometimes, after a long week's work, he will write exhausted letters to his friends, telling how he has solved a problem, or disagreed with a pundit. And then – 'But Lord! (*à la Pepys*) who cares whether the authority be Rowe, or Pope, or Steevens, or Singer . . .' For himself, he confessed, he liked to read Shakespeare in the Globe edition, with no suggestions nor annotations on any single leaf of the book. When he saw, reading his own edition, in proof, the ranks of comment on some classically difficult passage, he began to wonder whether they amounted to so much. He even, in time, showed a cheeky tendency to make fun, as when, after quoting seven or eight pages of learned comment on Jaques' word 'Ducdame,' he points out Jaques' own explanation of the word a few lines further on ('A Greek invocation to call fools into a circle').

All this will naturally and rightly commend Furness to the lay reader. But there is another paradox, much deeper, revealing an inward, a Miltonic kind of dissension. The biographer will soon become aware that there is a Furness problem, which gives a cast, a bias, to his work. New England Unitarianism, nineteenth century high culture, was consistently enlightened in its emancipation. Sometimes Furness suffered, like so many Lit men, from too

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much Light. There was a limit to what he could admire. Furness knew Walt Whitman, and admired his handsomeness, his picturesqueness. But there are things in Whitman which are almost dark. Under no possible circumstances could Furness ever have produced a Variorum Whitman. 'No man with self-respect, or with children,' he writes, 'could edit these so-called poems unexpurgated. I pleaded the fact to Walt once, and spoke to him plainly enough about his shocking impropriety. But he was as deaf as an adder to my conjurations. He said 'No, Horace . . . (etc.) . . . The truth is that Walt was a shocking *poseur* all his life.' Now this is interesting to us, because we at once remember that besides the idealism, the light, the charm, the romance in Shakespeare, there are other worlds, of sensuality, majestic coarseness, darkest passion. And Furness must have known the verbal meaning of plays like *Troilus*, *Measure for Measure*, *2 Henry IV*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, as well as they could be known.

What does he do? He denies that such things are in Shakespeare. Not only – in *Antony and Cleopatra* for instance – does he seem especially to emasculate the sense of certain thoughts by appending airy discussions of etymology, textual variants, etc., and by pasting in large quotations from those favourite female commentators of his, Mrs. Jameson and Lady Martin. His denial is explicit. In his introduction to the play, he exposes an error:

It is with unfeigned regret that I dissent from our finest Shakespearian critic [Coleridge] . . . that this

play is one involving the love of passion and appetite. Where in this play is there any proof of it? Where is there any scene of passion? Where is there a word which, had it been addressed by a husband to a wife, we should not approve? And because they were not married is that love at once to be changed to sensuality? . . . Is wandering in the streets sensual? Is teasing past endurance sensual? Is fishing sensual? Such are the glimpses that we get into the common life of this 'sensual' pair. If these pastimes be sensual, then are tennis and cricket sensual.

*Antony* is a play which seems especially to have attracted him. Later in his life his Shakespearian readings, reminiscent of his father's voice and Fanny Kemble's manner, were famous. This, frequently, was the play he chose. As he said:

What a tribute to the power of the imagination under the hand of Shakespeare, he wrote, that the fascinating Egyptian queen should be presented not only by a white-haired man, but a man more than ordinarily dull and plain of feature, and that when he applies to his shirt-front an imaginary asp and says, 'Dost thou not see the baby at my breast that rocks the nurse asleep?' the hearers' eyes should fill with emotion.

This is not a tribute to another kind of imagination in Furness. His appearance at this time was patriarchal: he read very well. Yet there must have been a great Litting of Shakespeare in those Southern drawing-rooms.

But *do not speak lightly of the commentators*, says Furness. Nor do we here. If it is only hodwork, it must be the most skilled and fascinating hodwork in the world, fit only for the sensitive, and for those who

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are awake to genius. All that is emphasised, in this history, is that the Shakespeare of Lit, of the editions, must always be Shakespeare in terms of one limited culture.

### *The Nineteenth Century*

It can be shown that all the elements of this culture we are describing were established by the end of the eighteenth century. Now is the stage set for the great period. But before I speak of the final element which belongs particularly to the nineteenth a word must be said of the atmosphere, favourable to Lit, in which the new century was inaugurated.

For the Dates of Authors question in the English Paper of my matric. examination, the following couplet, with its refrain, was useful:

Wordsworth Scott Coleridge Hallam  
Landon Southey Campbell and Lamb  
*Were born in the seventeen-seventies.*

These writers are considered to inaugurate the 'Romantic Revival.' I have already explained the Great Sandwich – the wedge of classic between the two slices of Romantic. The thesis is that just before the year 1800 an unusually rich crop ripened to dispel the age of criticism by creative poetry – the top slice.

No one can deny the change in taste. The Ah-the-Past movement which I have been describing leads naturally up to it. Indeed, with the exception of Blake all the great new writers of this period were touched by the fashion, were touched by Lit, so

that Lit received sanction at their hands. More important still (and I warn the reader that I find this a little difficult to put into words, and fear, though I believe it to be true, that it may seem sophistical) – more important is the fact that when these great writers had been dead long enough to be admired by Litdom, it was these ephemeral, vogueish qualities for which they were admired; it was by these superficial characteristics not by the characteristics which marked their absolute difference, their New, their real creation, that they became known.

I have already written of the Litting of Coleridge. With Coleridge was connected not the power of courageous self-exploration, incredible sensitiveness, and the kind of thinking which is braver and more concrete than any physical action, but a belief that romantic experiments like *Kubla Khan* and *Christabel* are the greatest kind of poetry (and also, perhaps, Lit's romantically serious tone of voice when talking about Shakespeare). Wordsworth is an even more obvious case. His gigantic figure dwindles and collapses under Lit till he is turned into the Keeper of Lit's Nature. And Lit's nature is not anything so sensible as the eighteenth century's (which stood for polite society): nor is it anything which could possibly be connected with philosophic speculations (always a pity) on subject and object. It might be defined as (1) a 'good' (i.e. distant) view, including if possible rocks and waterfalls, and (2) small spring flowers (since Arnold and the short-sighted Tenny-

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son, closer views, and wet bird-haunted English lawns have been added). And then there is Shelley, with the Lit version of whom are connected notions about the rightness of idealist emancipation and liberty as praised by writers dead a certain specified number of years.

Until finally there comes to mind this world's own Charles Lamb. The essays and letters of this beautiful writer have been sanctified by the praise of generations of Ing-habitants. Here are certainly all the elements together – loving the past, paternally appreciating the seventeenth century, genius worship, and personal niceness plus knowledge of the heart in abundance. And not a word to Bowdlerise: not one regrettable metaphysical or religious speculation. Indeed even to the rebellious layman these qualities in Lamb are admirable. For in Lamb alone – speaking from the layman's point of view – are they allowable. He revived interest in a literary age which really was still suffering from barbarous lack of appreciation. His anthology of dramatists really did reveal for the first time writers worth re-exploration. And his character, of the small man sardonically humorous in the face of disasters, human and understanding, is as unaffected as the tragedy was real.

Altogether it is not unnatural that, unfortunately for his reputation, Charles Lamb has become the presiding genius of the whole structure. No true Litman ever speaks of him in any other terms than those of loving affection. Yet with Charles Lamb,

in whom the attitude existed pure, should it have ended. How far it was from ending, the history of its heyday in the nineteenth century will show.

### *Genius Mania*

This history becomes, now, bound up with the account of the academic teaching of English Literature, with the 'Lit. Ang.' which I am leaving for Part II. But there is one further element, intensely characteristic of the period, which I should place here. The nineteenth century is the great age of genius-running. The period when great English writers began to be regarded as members of a different, of an Olympian race, between whom and their worshippers stood an impassable barrier. The gentleman who travelled from Leeds to steal souvenir bristles from Dr. Johnson's hearthbrush was introducing a dangerous germ of irrationality destined to breed an epidemic mania. In his line stand not only the young men who imitated Byron's limp and their immediate successors who caught their breath when they heard approaching the voice of Dr. Gillman's lodger at Highgate. Literary excursions to the Lakes descend from him; trips to the Isle of Wight to catch a glimpse of a later laureate; books on the 'Hardy Country'; the Browning Society; and the Stratfordisation of birthplaces.

And as Dr. Johnson was the first great exhibit, so was the interest of his life, and Boswell's record of it, to have endless repercussions in our Age. The nineteenth century is the period of Lit biographies. One

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by one the men of letters came up for inclusion in order of eligibility, until the English Men of Letters had to start a new Series on such daringly recent subjects as Swinburne.

The old Series is perfect Lit. Whatever the facts of the subject's life, the telling of it follows a certain mysteriously predetermined form. At the start (PARENTS) well-written little details about family and birth. ('The father's mother was a Cawdle, and in the Cawdles' blood had flowed for centuries the salt tang of the sea and the strange motives which send men-folk a-roving.') Here there will be one good story about the father, or Uncle Fonsetty, and how the poet was saved from drowning, or a mad dog. Then (BOYHOOD) how the poet was always wandering off in the fields with a book, alone. (Compare later Love of Nature and/or how his early life was lived entirely in the realm of the Imagination.) But how – no bookworm – he stood up to the farmer's boy, how he stopped him beating the cat (cf. future love of liberty). Then (SCHOOLDAYS) foreshadowings. Looking at a woodcut of the leaning tower of Pisa . . . priggish letters to relatives . . . six lines of early verse (note already his characteristic love of the *scents* of things). Thus to first love passages – terrible test, this, for the not too skilful writer. Shall he be fatherly and speak of calf-love? Generally speaking, he will. Or he will be arch ('Then, apparently, there was a "Julia." Yet before that, if the verses *To a larch-wood in Summer* mean anything, there had been a "Rose" as well. Yet

perhaps we are not to take the meaning of these lines too seriously – or to regard them rather as a youthful, etc.’). And then there is a general stiffening up of the biographer. The great period of his Subject’s output is approaching. Already, the first authentic note has been struck. Without gusto, he prepares himself for the purple passage of praise. Soon over. After the thread has been temporarily broken by a chapter of magnum opus ‘appreciation,’ comes a change. In the criticism efforts are made not to be partisan. There is always one bit with ‘this, in our view, is the least successful of his productions.’ Then that will be balanced by high praise for something no one else has ever dreamed of reading. Pause. Bad luck. Tragedy. (LATER YEARS.) Later work; just as good (or alternatively, lacks the sweep of what-name). Last letters. Death-disease mentioned with decency . . . last characteristic flash on characteristic death-bed . . . forgotten, but at death forceful utterance of fellow-genius . . . praise and recognition posthumous. Mysteriously almost all these factors enter into almost all the biographies. And then with equal regularity, certain omissions are made. Recently things have changed, but in the true old series there is no indication of the strong sensuality and passion which usually accompanies genius. This omission, however, is inclined to be balanced by hinting footnotes which come vaguely under the heading of Sex. There has been, for instance, a library of footnotes on the ‘Calais episode’ of Wordsworth’s youth. The open text-book discus-

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sion of this has marked an important era, though of course there are always Professors who 'know something' about the subject, who are knowledgeable in the common room about what is never printed, and can tell you that A was unfaithful to B, that C was an illegitimate child, that D was impotent, or that E wrote an unpublishable Epic in which he extolled a secret vice. But in print, in the Life, the hero is always made into a hero of this nineteenth-century sub-culture – solitary, kind, sad, humorous, hidden tragedy, Christian. Thus it has been, and thus it still is.

Is this then *the book, the biography famous* (one thinks of Whitman's lines) – Is this *what the author calls a man's life*?

And so will some one when I am dead and gone write  
my life?

As if any man really knew aught of my life,  
When even I myself I often think know little or nothing  
of my real life,

Only a few hints, a few diffused faint clews and in-  
directions.

I think that the Man of Letters who has given most trouble, whom the biographers have found, in the end, most dampingly difficult to render into Lit terms, and who has tempted them to the fearful task most often, is Burns. The case of Burns is peculiar and complicated – and important, as may be shown, in the subsequent development of the subject.

Burns seems at first thought so tempting a subject for this kind of biography. He wrote poems in dialect, interesting fact, and fascinating fact, because the dialect is so delightful. He is obviously human-heart-understanding to a degree. And in his life the early poverty was genuine, never more so, and the rise truly dramatic. For he was the native, natural poet, the ploughboy poet – obvious example of the fairy-godmother bestowal of genius. Then, there was Laura, Mary, etc. And then picturesquely, ‘it may have been his convivial tastes, that very love of his fellow men, which led to that fatal, too facile indulgence in the “botl”.’ Good place for an eloquent passage here. And then decline. Loss of fame.

Yet, almost immediately, difficulties appear. Burns himself was *not* a god-visited ploughboy. Serious reading very soon reveals that on the contrary Burns himself was a keen student of Lit, and in his non-dialect poems wrote perfect Lit verses; even the dialect was the result of highly literary experimentation. And then his life. The keenest professor will find it no joke keeping up the atmosphere of respectful research when he is recording the long detail of his loves. Burns is richly sensual, the professor maybe is not. The love poems are scorching. The professor flinches, his archness cracks; almost impatient, he cannot help a note of reproof coming in . . . There must be a mistake, the whole thing has been much exaggerated. Blankly, the labouring biographer takes refuge in eloquence:

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his gospel was one of joy and hope. . . . No subject was too humble for his muse. He was eminently patriotic, yet his sympathies were not confined to Scotland. He is the poet of common humanity, whose everyday toil, joys, sorrows and aspirations he glorified by his song.

This is safe. Not for an Age but for All Time. That Lit phrase must be all right. Biographer No. 2 picks up this theme:

They are primarily local in their appeal, these pictures of Ayrshire farm life; yet beneath the labour of the farmer is the most fundamental of all human occupations. Burns' portraits of his friends and neighbours are of interest wherever seed is sown or harvest garnered.

But what about the flaming, flaming lyrics?  
Don't hurry. They will be taken in their turn:

In song . . . his theme is mainly love, and the treatment of it mainly passionate.

Shall we say 86 per cent passionate? But here are 420 pages devoted to the Life of Burns; something more than a short sentence must be said about this Flame.

By good luck, another Lit phrase-of-all-work floats into the mind:

Here is the brilliant phrase, the flawless rhythm, and – burning through every line – the *seva indignatio* which only genius can impart to the printed page.

For conclusion, the summary is always the same. That Burns or whoever it is was more simple, more

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natural, than has been made out. Not so different from the general run of men:

Poet he was in very truth; but he was also a steady-going man of affairs, richly endowed with the homely virtue of common sense.

Not so very different from the biographer himself.

Thus, in the world of Eng. Lit. is the biography famous. Thus is the criticism, the ethic, the motive. Thus, in outline, was its early history. The detail of its heyday, and the symptoms of its decline, can best be observed by moving to the site of the new important Movements, the ancient Institutions, with which it was soon to come into contact.

## II

### LIT. ANG.

An English education! Glorious prize! – *Nahum Tate.*

### INTRODUCTION

Now is the time to tell the history of an entirely new element in the progress of Lit, of a change which had profound influences on Literature itself.

In the year 1893, unwillingly following the example of the provincial universities, Oxford allowed itself an Honours School of English Language and Literature. In 1897 a first tiny *cache* of students had prepared, though none of them got so far as actually sitting, for the first examination papers headed *In Literis Anglicis*. Calling it Lit. Ang. for short, the history of the academic teaching of this subject I will try to trace.

Lit. Ang. obviously needs a section to itself. Yet it is not so disconnected from the first part of this book as might be expected. It would have been reasonable to prophesy, when the great Universities permitted entrance to English Literature, when they brought their machinery of teaching and their experience to bear on this great subject, on this art for which in the world England is most famous, that the Principles of that study would be evolved, that mis-

conceptions would be cleared, that irrelevancies would be dismissed to the other Schools to which they belonged, that roots would be tended and superfluous growths pruned away: that the whole 'Eng. Lit.' attitude to the subject, especially, would be superseded entirely as being neither scientific nor humanist, as being popular in the worst sense of that word.

But in fact this fresh start was never made. Whatever gradual emancipations there may have been since, at the start the necessary break was not there. 'In the beginning,' records Professor Nichol Smith, 'the New School was allowed to take its own course.' This was even more true of the universities which adopted the subject earlier in the century, and needless to say 'taking its own course' usually meant following methods of approach already in existence.

Following methods of approach, it may be added, laid down for more or less disconnected subjects. Here already are the two commonplaces of the world of Education which the following of this particular thread has enabled me to re-see. First that this subject, Education, is of all the great and ancient studies the most deficient in a philosophy – the weakest in principles – (I mean of course 'Principles,' with the largest, the most Coleridgean, capital 'P'). Second, that it seems to be connected with a specially inescapable tradition of conservatism, that it follows in the rear of changing life, and that when, at last, it moves unwillingly forward, all

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kinds of heirlooms and old habits are dragged in its wake.

The extraordinary series of adjustments and approximations, of campaigning and counter-campaigning, of pioneering fanaticism and civil warfare which preceded the founding of the new school in the nineteenth century; the long series of reforms and experiments, the train of incisive and of woolly teachers, of great and stimulating personalities, and of the dampingly characterless; the press campaigns, the diplomacies and intrepidities and arguments which led, at last, to the triumph over a resisting Oxford, to the Fall of Oxford, in 1893, when the New Subject received the final recognition which led within such a few years to its extraordinary popularity under the greatest of all its teachers; the reasons for these confusions, how the business of 'comment on the following,' Middle English Grammar, criticisms of the lack of melody in Cowley, grew out of a spontaneous desire for assistance in the exploration of the writings of great Englishmen – all this seems worth the study it has never received if only for the light it throws on the subject of Education. The outline of such a study I here attempt.

## ANCESTRY. *The Rhetoricians*

1893, it will be noted, is a recent date: so recent, that it might have been expected that there would be insufficient history to trace even the general character of Lit. Ang.'s evolution. So I thought when I began this enquiry.

I was forgetting the conservative principle in education, its linking of new subjects with old ones, its choice of *method* of study by the pre-Baconian qualification of ancientness. It is a familiar criticism that many of our contemporary Lit examination questions, especially the textual questions, are too rigidly copied from the Classics papers. But the general lines adopted come from a very much older, from a truly venerable subject.

There are two anachronistic curios in the Lit of 1935. The first is a question liable to be set in the Matric. English paper. It will run something like this:

### *Figures of Speech.*

Explain the difference between Irony and Satire.

Quote an example of Hyperbole. What is synecdoche?

'Figures' . . . In the *Matriculation English Course*, the part author of which is that Correspondence College Briggs who has been made even more famous re-

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cently in Wells's Autobiography, a whole chapter is devoted to this strange subject.

The second curiosity is the title of the Professor of English Literature at Edinburgh University:

Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres.

What is the connection? Both matric. question and Title are vestiges of the same ancestral animal – one of the most ancient of educational subjects – Rhetoric.

In the *O.E.D.* 'rhetoric' is defined as the 'art of using language so as to persuade or influence others,' but even to Aristotle the name is used to cover something much wider. The third book of his *Rhetoric* includes the art of composition, and the art of literary ornamentation.

The history of Rhetoric cannot be simplified into any progress-like shape. There are cycles, ebbings and flowings, which, since in them already the reader may detect some prefiguration of the history of Lit. Ang., I will specify.

A man holding belief in some cause arises. His belief makes him eloquent. It seems to his audience that his methods are not only admirable but capable of analysis. This analysis a succeeding generation translates into a proof that there is an Art of Rhetoric which can be learnt. The methods are imitated and turned into devices for gaining pre-arranged effects. The devices become stereotyped; rhetoric dwindles to mimicry, to pedantry. Until the man of genius comes again, with material for urgent expression, to

supersede these devices by his own inspiration, and the cycle starts all over again.

Already, by Plato's time, Rhetoric had thus thrived and decayed. Socrates is made to ask 'Yes, but what is the argument *about?*' The term 'sophist' becomes, for a period, abusive. Then comes Aristotle's inspired schematism to give it new life. Then again, decay – 'the fabrication of florid declamations or strained conceits which prevailed in the rhetorical schools of Asia.' In Rome, rhetoric became re-connected with meaning through Cicero, who put it to urgent uses, only for it to relapse again, in the time of the later Empire, when politics and philosophy and literature had lost their validity, into an educational end in itself, with the sophists ruling once more.<sup>1</sup>

In the Middle Ages, under certain great teachers, rhetoric revived yet again. It was natural that it should form part of the Trivium, of the B.A. course, before the days of written examinations, when the art of persuasive speech was directly useful even to the undergraduate. In those days of *Vivas* and public disputations, in the days before printing, in the days before text-books, when lectures were necessary and attended, rhetoric must have had reality for student and professor. But as the Middle Ages retired and printing became general, so did rhetoric lose life once more, restricted more and more to mechanical rules, less and less of a contrast to Logic, the subject which it was intended to complement. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Cf. C. S. Baldwin, *Ancient Rhetoric*, and *Medieval Rhetoric*.

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In England, the teaching of rhetoric seems to have been early. First, encyclopædia dates are tremendously dark. In 879 Alfred instituted a grammar and rhetoric lecture at Oxford. In 1109 at Cambridge Monk William read a lecture in Tully's rhetoric and Quintilian's Flores 'daily at three o'clock,' and so on. Doubtless no special early leaning of the Ang. for Lit can be claimed here: there seems scarcely any kind of limit to the depths attainable in this sort of first-date probe. Something more relevant begins with the institution, in 1519 by Wolsey, of a rhetoric and humanity lecture at Oxford. It is said that the lectures of Vives, third holder, were so eloquent as to cause 'degrees in Grammar, Rhetoric and Poetry to be solemnly taken in the University, having for many years, if not ages, been totally neglected.' Further, it is said that "rhetoric and orations" seems to have been the chief influence among the subjects taught to writers, statesmen and gentlemen of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.'

There is evidence, in fact, that England took to the teaching of rhetoric with gusto. The quality of this teaching it is at first rather difficult to assess. But what is certain is that the English genius for self-expression through words prevented it from ever becoming the stereotyped thing it had settled into on the continent. Two of our greatest late renaissance figures, using the same metaphor, express what was very likely the general attitude. Bacon:

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Logic differeth from rhetoric, not only as the fist from the palm – the one close, the other at large – but much more in this, that logic handleth reason exact and in truth and rhetoric handleth it as it is planted in popular opinions and manners . . . the end of rhetoric is to fill the imagination, to second reason and not to oppress it.

and Milton (who in his *Tractate on Education* emphasises rhetoric by placing it at the end of the curriculum):

Logic, therefore, as much as is useful . . . until it be time to open her contracted palm, into a graceful and ornate Rhetoric.

And if the quality of the earliest teaching is unknown, there is no doubt about the originality of the earliest manuals. Very soon, their authors were making a link with the study of the vernacular, an experiment which, joined to rhetoric, kept the plan of the manuals constantly changing. Very soon chapters begin to show a surprisingly familiar turn of phrase . . . students of the history of Lit. Ang. must follow these gradations very carefully. I will point out some of them.

1. The first renascence Rhetorics, like the mediæval ones, were written in Latin with Latin examples from Latin authors. But these authors were among the first to write in their own language. The first English Rhetoric, a school-book, was by Leonard Cox, its date 1524. More famous now, and written for a more cultivated reader, is Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric*, 1553, the importance of which was re-discovered as early as Warton, who calls it 'the first

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book or system of criticism in our language.' Saintsbury says of Wilson that he 'gears the new critical tendency on to the old technical rhetoric.'

2. The second innovation, almost as subversive, is the introduction in the discussion of style, of examples from English writers. E.g. Abraham Fraunce, in the *Arcadian Rhetoric, or the Precepts of Rhetoric made plain by examples*, 1584, applied the rules primarily to an exposition of the beauties of Sidney's *Arcadia*.

Thomas Blount's *Academie of Eloquence*, 1654, was the first to use English examples exclusively.

3. Puttenham's *Rhetoric*, 1589. Not only does this bear the unconventional, pioneering title *The Art of English Poesie*: it marks a step in that it gives examples not from one English author only but from many – from Chaucer, from Wyatt, from Surrey, from Sidney.

4. Most of these innovations belong to the sixteenth century. Up to 1700 these books were still most of them written in Latin. But at the Restoration there came another change. I do not know whether it is true to say that the 'training in rhetoric, especially the training in the value of variety in style, is an important factor in accounting for the wealth of imagery and expression in sixteenth and seventeenth century literature.' But it is obvious that that side of the subject fits in more naturally with the Elizabethans than with the new prose writers of Charles II and their insistence on a 'naked, natural' style of writing. Rhetoric begins to seem out of date, and the old subject begins to be laughed

at. In the sixteen-sixties, for instance, they were making fun of such bits of advice as this:

Both in the reading the profane authors and Holy Scriptures if you be ignorant in the figurative Speeches and tropes, you are like in many great doubts to make but a slender solution. . . .

Sprat protests that 'ornaments of speech are in open defiance against reason': Samuel Butler scorns the affected writer:

For rhetoric he could not ope  
His mouth, but out there came a trope.

Dryden and Cowley are explicitly against 'rhetoric,' which now comes to bear the bad sense which we give to the word 'rhetorical.' Bunyan's success among intellectuals is a sign of the change of taste. The style of Dryden and Addison, or of South and Tillotson before them, is obviously anti-rhetorical, even if Dryden could still be justly parodied (in *The Rehearsal*) for the fault of over-figured writing in his heroic drama:

BAYES: Now here she must make a simile.

SMITH: Where's the necessity of that, Mr. Bayes?

BAYES: Because she's surprised; that's a general rule; you must ever make a simile when you are surprised; 'tis a new way of writing.

Now once the 'figures,' etc., were reduced to a subordinate position, the rhetorics came nearer and nearer to being embryonic text-books of English literature. The eighteenth-century manuals (now with a small tradition of English Literature criticism

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to help them) definitely concentrate on the exponents of the styles they are exemplifying. More and more unmistakably, discussion of figures has merged into discussion of styles, and the tendency towards the general 'appreciation' of literature begins to show.

5. Finally, in the eighteenth century was added the historical study of the language. It is easy to see how this prepared the way for Lit. Ang. If our language can be shown to have been only recently stabilised, is it not then arguable that in its future it will produce literature as important as that of Greece or Italy? Might not even our pioneer writers of the past be regarded with respect by posterity? Talk of the purity of the English tongue began to be heard, so that even Dr. Johnson could say:

Our language . . . has been gradually departing from its original Teutonic character, and deviating towards a Gallic structure and phraseology from which it ought to be our endeavour to recall it.

*Summary.* By some such genealogising as this, it can be shown (to quote a summary) <sup>1</sup> that the 'work of the English Rhetorical writers is of vital importance in the history of education and of English Language and Literature. The earlier rhetorics had treated of ornamentation in speech and writing, and

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph, most of the facts, and many of the quotations in this chapter have been borrowed by me from a thesis by Miss Ruth Entwistle, *The English Rhetoricians*. Unfortunately this is only to be seen in the library of London University. In a world which sees the almost daily publication of unwanted theses, this interesting and valuable one has been left alone. Strange -- but very Lit-like.

for that purpose had devised an elaborate system of figures of speech and of rules for their application' . . . with examples from *the classics*. . . . 'In these rhetorics are to be found, however, indications of the new rhetoric which achieved maturity in the eighteenth century. These are, the growing interest in the English language, an increasing love of English Literature, and the beginning of literary criticism arising from the discussion of rhetorical rules.'

*The Strange Case of the Haunted Syllabus*

Note, before leaving the subject, that there is another side, in the history of Lit. Ang., to this question of the Rhetorics.

To return once more to that strange matrix. question about the Figures of Speech. Because these mediæval text-books are the ancestors of modern Lit teaching – for that very reason vestigial remains, relics of the older subject, still linger. Lit. Ang. is haunted by Mediæval Rhetoric.

Why, for instance, is it taken as a first axiom, never to be questioned in the drawing up of courses, that literature and language must be taken side by side?

Because rhetoric *and grammar* have been studied together since mediæval times. Again, its derivation from successive codifiers has imbued rhetoric with an atmosphere of rules and rule-breaking, absolute rules for writing in general, and criticism of individual writers not by their own standards but by the standard of these laws.

Or to take an isolated example. Unprecise, un-

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critical, pseudo-scientific praise for 'natural character study' has been a characteristic of Lit ever since it began. Note how the sixteenth-century Puttenham, one of the earliest rhetoricians to write in English, devotes this kind of space to what he likes to call 'prosopographia' – i.e. character drawing. He praises it in Chaucer's work, calling it 'natural' there. The whole is derived from the Roman rhetorics, from Quintilian, and from the fact that it was traditional to make the description of a character an exercise in the composition class.

To go back to the 'figures' once more, the student of these early rhetorics who compares them with modern literary instruction will see that we have never really got away from them. Their origin is so obscure: they are fascinating as ancient mysteries, or as fiction, or as 'art.' The notes and commentaries of modern Lit are full of references not necessarily to the Figures but to effects, to devices. From these earliest educationists, from the habit of Aristotle himself, Lit. Ang. has inherited its attitude to writing, its tendency to regard writing as something *existing by itself*, instead of as a medium, of varying transparency, between the author and the reader.

These innovations, approximations towards the modern teaching of English Literature, and these hampering, atavistic characters, combine in the first forceful teacher, the first man of prestige to associate himself with the latest kind of eighteenth-century rhetoric. But before we come to the famous Hugh Blair, we must go back for a moment to consider

how it became possible, under anybody, for the teaching of literature to be not incidental to something else, but the main theme, acknowledged in all but name, of the discourse.

*Prejudice Overcome*

Before English Literature could be accepted, the desirability, as a subject for study, of English itself, had to be accepted.

There had been more than one change in the attitude towards the teaching of our language since Elizabeth. Before Shakespeare and Spenser had sanctified it, to write in English at all seemed modernistic, unacceptable to the pundits. Of his *Toxophilus* Ascham says 'to have written it in another tongue had been more profitable for my study and also more honest for my name.' But after Spenser, the tide turned the other way. Spenser's headmaster Mulcaster was one of those who made the innovation of English teaching a definite progressive act, a movement significantly praised by the most classical of Elizabethan writers, Ben Jonson. In his words:

We free our language from the opinion of rudeness and barbarism, wherewith it is mistaken to be diseased; we show the copy of it and matchableness with other tongues; we ripen the wits of our own children and youth the sooner by it, and advance their knowledge.

Later in the seventeenth century, English was further dignified by the discovery of the merits of the English translation of the Bible. The scientists, too, of that century supported a break from educational

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tradition. Locke was in favour. Whatever foreign languages are studied, he says, English is the one with which most trouble should be taken.

In the eighteenth century the tide turned back. A new kind of admiration for the classics arose, not as the source of all knowledge, but as 'Art,' as Refinement. Even Locke had said that he looked upon Latin as 'absolutely necessary to a gentleman.'<sup>1</sup> The world of refined culture quoted Horace or Claudian to a man, with the result that in the eighteenth century 'the classics' were a social necessity. Latin, moreover, was still the international language, and therefore the language of diplomacy and science, as well as of scholars and the law. Education became more exclusively Latinist than ever. The teaching of English, in spite of the new rhetorics, lapsed. And later in the century, long after the special classical vogue had died down, syllabuses, haunted and haunted as ever by the past, remained the same.

In the end, lay opinion bore down the pedagogic. In the seventeen-sixties, complaints again began to be heard. Thus Priestley:

How many grammar schools have we, and of no small reputation, which are destitute of all provision for the regular teaching of it? [English]. All the skill our youth at school have in it being acquired in an indirect manner by the mere practice of using it in verbal translations.

<sup>1</sup> Hobbes, on the other hand, actually preferred English to Latin, and for a strange reason. He thought the Civil War was due to the desire of classically trained Englishmen to re-live the Greek and Latin civil wars they had studied.

Joseph Priestley was an exceptional man. Perhaps it would be fairer to quote one very unexceptional opinion, from an almost perfectly average person.

In the year 1770, in Edinburgh, was published a book the bold and subversive scheme of which was as adventurously pioneering as its author, Mr. James Buchanan, was unknown. This was its astonishing title:

A PLAN of an English Grammar-School Education. With an introductory Inquiry, whether by the ENGLISH Language alone, without the Embarrassment of LATIN and Greek, the BRITISH YOUTH, in general, cannot be thoroughly accomplished in every Part of useful and polite Literature, and qualified to make a more early, advantageous, and elegant Figure in Life.

Space is given to the description of Courtiers, who not only do speak English, but cannot speak Latin. To Ladies, 'and especially those of rank who keep polite company, express themselves in a pure and unaffected strain of language, to which few who are great Latin and Greek scholars do ever attain.' Having quoted Addison and the celebrated Dr. Locke in his own support, the author goes on to make explicit one of those intelligent questions which the average man was to ask himself more and more frequently in the next century:

Why, he says, should not the study of Swift, Addison, Pope, Dryden, etc., produce the same effects as the study of the classics?

For example, what a reverence have youth and ignorance been forced to pay to the poems of Anacreon?

## ANCESTRY

And what are these poems? Why truly nothing more than a set of drinking songs, and love madrigals. As such, they passed and were used in ancient Greece. They are, however, richly decked and explained in colleges with great solemnity and minuteness . . . yet if any one should advertise, that he was to prelect upon the Syren, the Lark, the Tea-Table Miscellany, such a professor would obtain but few fees. . . . Or Swift . . . the learned would cry out, that Swift is indelicate.

Anticipating even more boldly, Buchanan demands that there should be 'a professor of the English language in each of our universities. . . .'

Educational changes were in the air. But it was not the grammar schools which made the change. Before the end of the eighteenth century middle-class parents were sending their children to those private schools known as 'Academies,' schools which aimed at adapting their teaching more to the actual needs of the scholars. Here there was a new specialisation on modern studies, including English Grammar and Composition; including sometimes the reading of English Literature.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the necessary preliminary, the removal of the prejudice against teaching English, is under way.

The next move, the new enthusiasm which was to thaw the prejudice against the teaching of Literature, came from another quarter. It was no coincidence that Buchanan's book was printed in Edinburgh. The next innovation was to come from Scotland.

<sup>1</sup> *Report on the Teaching of English, 1921.*

## YOUTH. *Scotland*

It is noteworthy that except for this part-time Oxford Chair [of Poetry, which doesn't count because it had no connection with any Faculty and because English poets were barely mentioned] the academic teaching of English began in Scotland.

*Report on the Teaching of English*, p. 243.

The formal words of the report gloss a pioneering experiment which was to have tremendous results. No special compliments are bestowed; there are no reasons suggested, why this child should have been begot by this parent.

Why should Academic Scotland have so daringly broken the ice?

One reason may be that even as late as 1800 the gap between the two countries was greater than it is now. Tradition and language were as much wider apart as, before the days of railways and roads, were the countries themselves. For the North, England was a foreign nation, and as such, it was much easier to regard her literature with respect: easier to begin to regard her great books as 'classic.'

Perhaps for this reason Latin was dropped from the University lectures sooner in Scotland than in England. To lecture in good English was in itself no unimportant feat of linguistic scholarship: and for the lecturer struggling with his

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English, a high respect for the successful English writers was natural. By the end of the eighteenth century references to English literature had crept into the logic lectures. One Southern student at least thought a sentence worth taking down *verbatim*. It must be quoted:

An' noo, Genelman, ye'll occoope yousels in reading Milton's Works, Thamsen's Saasens, Robertson's Scotlan', an' Gra - hm's Saabeth; Pop's Homer's a vary gude buk tu.

Burns would certainly have agreed with this opinion: and Scott 'the most English of writers,' as Byron said, edited and praised the English classics with almost hero-worshipping admiration.

A more obvious explanation is that the Scottish have always been pioneers in education. More Scots vigour has gone into teaching than into anything else, as readers of the indexes to histories of education will quickly guess. That word 'Education' has not in Scotland the stiff-collared, official-note-paper quality which it bears in England. The personification of 'Education' there is not the speech-making head of a Board, but that good Scottish dominie almost every one will have had contact with once in their lives. Thin, shaved, small-boned face. Precise mouth and precise Scots speech. Affectionate asperity, and the definite personality essential to the really successful teacher. Nearly every one will have had touch with some such master and will recollect, not perhaps what has been taught,

but the stimulus of the teaching. Through these men, Scotland, its universities in particular, have been successful in keeping the organisation of studies fluid, leaving room for a change in the syllabus to meet new subjects, allowing new combinations of subjects to arise. All attempts to bring Scotland into academic line with the rest of Britain have been mildly but effectively resisted. The following historical footnote will exemplify. In the process of the 'civilisation' of Scotland by England in 1688, the period which saw the patronising 'recognition' by the state of the universities as state institutions, a commission was chosen to visit the four Scotch universities and make recommendations towards uniformity. For nearly a dozen years a commission conscientiously enquired, studied the abstract principle of stabilisation, travelled, met with difficulties, brightly invented ways out of them, and at length drew up a beautifully full and detailed Report, and delivered it into the hands of Gilbert Rule, Principal of Edinburgh University. But Rule happened to be a particularly pugnacious example of this very kind of Scottish dominie I have described. Having accepted the report with polite if laconic thanks, he put it in a drawer. The commission took a holiday, its duty done. They had been well paid: there was no hurry: Rule was an old man. But after his death, the report was nowhere to be found. Or perhaps it may not have been looked for very thoroughly. In the end, not one sentence of its recommendations was followed up.

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Through its Gilbert Rules, Scottish education kept its individuality, and its fluidity.

Scottish academic instruction could avoid the pitfalls into which Oxford and Cambridge were sinking at this time. It could more easily supersede, for instance, that tendency towards the establishment of an all-powerful band of tutor-examiners who themselves covered the whole field of studies for their pupils, leaving specialist, outside subjects to Professors who never lectured or who were never listened to. In Scotland this practice in the past had existed. It was known as 'regenting.' Under this system 'not a single subject, but the entire curriculum of a class of students throughout their four years' course was entrusted to the teacher, so that he had to be something of a walking encyclopædia.' But this evil was soon recognised and remedied. In 1708, Edinburgh University abolished it at one sweep, and in the lively reaction which followed, Scotland became the exclusive home of the best specialist education, and has remained so till within recent times.

### *The Pioneers: Blair*

One feels, in spite of the archetypally early date of the lecture-quotation in the last section, that that particular teacher cannot have inspired much excitement. For the launching on conservative youth of a new subject, of a new specialisation, teachers of personality are necessary.

The place of Father of Lit. Ang. lecturing must be given to Dr. Hugh Blair, 1718-1810, once famous as

the author of Sermons. His treatment of the subject is still in the transition stage; he calls his course 'rhetoric' and it is dominated by the habits of rhetoric; but already it is half evolved into the Lit teaching of the future.

Though the Father he yet was not quite the first. Saintsbury says that the first systematic lecturer in English Literature was Dr. John Aikin (1713-80) who taught it at the Warrington Academy,<sup>1</sup> a Lancashire School which during its short existence was famous as the centre of liberal politics and of the literary taste of the county, besides having other literary connections in that it was (1) the 'cradle of Unitarianism' (Frend . . . Coleridge . . . Pantisocracy) and (2) in that Aikin's daughter was the super-literary, famous Mrs. Barbauld, who once told Coleridge that there was not enough moral to the *Ancient Mariner*.

But there is a still earlier name than Aikin, and a more surprising one. Lord Kames suggested to the young, impecunious Adam Smith, not yet settled in his career, that he should make use of his argumentative dinner-table talk about French authors, etc., to lecture on English literature. These lectures were actually delivered, 1748-9, in Edinburgh: <sup>2</sup> nor did

<sup>1</sup> *History of Warrington Academy*, H. A. Bright.

<sup>2</sup> Standing as we are now at the threshold of Lit. Ang., among its inaugurators, the authority must be cited and quoted. It is John Rae's *Life of Adam Smith*. 'During the winter of 1748-9 he made a most successful beginning as a public lecturer by delivering a course on the then completely untried subject of English Literature, and gave at the same time a first contribution to English Literature himself by collecting and editing the poems of William Hamilton of

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they lead to nothing. They were never published – in fact Smith had the MSS. of them burnt. But there was a first enthusiastic student, a first fevered taker of Lit. Ang. lecture notes in the audience. The views seem pre-Lit in opinion – are indeed scarcely recognisable as part of Lower Criticism. Racine is preferred to Shakespeare, Lit's great No. 1. Most admired are Dryden, Swift, Pope and Gray. Most despised are Milton's minor poems, revivals of old poetry, and blank verse. One is reminded that if our subject had been born out of the eighteenth century instead of out of the romantic revival, these are the views which might still be current. These are the standards which the eighteenth century would have taken to its bosom. 'Had I known,' said Dr. Johnson of Adam Smith, 'that he loved rhyme so much . . . I should have hugged him.'<sup>1</sup>

Adam Smith's pioneer student was a typical Lit taker of notes except in the fact that he made use of them. It was the great Hugh Blair, who within a dozen years was to make them the basis of his own lectures. As climax to his career of successful sermon

Bangour. . . . Kames, or Mr. Henry Home [or Hume] as he then was, was law on all questions of taste, from an epic poem to a garden plot. . . . Because he had "little Latin and no Greek" he had thrown himself with all the greater zeal into the English Literature which had become all the rage in Scotland after the union. The subject was fresh, and it was fashionable, and although Stevenson, the Professor of Logic, had already lectured on it, and lectured on it in English too to his class, nobody had yet given lectures on it in open to the general public, whose interest at the moment it had so much enjoyed.'

<sup>1</sup> Contrast the opinion of the highly Lit Wordsworth, who calls him 'the worst critic, David Hume not excepted, that Scotland, a soil to which this sort of weed seems natural, has produced.'

preaching, he reached the highest church appointment in Edinburgh, an altitude from which he need deliver no more sermons than he liked. Instead, he could spend time talking to his literary friends – to the members of the Poker Club (founded 1762) for instance, where he could re-connect with Adam Smith, talk about the ‘natural’ way of writing with Hume, or discuss the merits of Collins with Adam Ferguson or Alexander Carlyle.<sup>1</sup>

It may be that his conscience pinched him. It may be that he had liked the discoursing. Yet sermon subjects were running dry. His real interest, now, was in Letters. A way out presented itself. He could preach – on how to preach. Give lectures on the rhetoric of sermons – to which views on the English writers would naturally attach themselves. So he ‘communicated to his friends a scheme of Lectures on composition, and having obtained the permission of the University, he began to read them in College on the 1st of December, 1759.’ By 1762 he was appointed Regius Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, a title which the Edinburgh Professor holds to this very day, with a salary (since increased) of £70 per annum.

Some said of his lectures that they bore too much resemblance to Adam Smith’s, but in fact the samenesses are part of traditional rhetoric, the differences

<sup>1</sup> Alexander Carlyle’s judgment of Blair was variable. ‘naïf . . . no wit nor humour . . . timid and unambitious . . . seemed to have no wish but to be admired as a preacher, particularly by the ladies.’ – *Autobiography*.

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lead courageously and pioneeringly on to the new subject.

Blair had an advanced notion of the purpose of rhetoric. For him it is not an art which is 'ostentatious and deceitful, the minute and trifling study of words alone. . . .' He wants, he says, to 'direct attention more to substance,' and attempt 'a critical examination of the most distinguished species of composition both in prose and verse.' Up to a certain limit, and judged by the general standards of academic criticism of his age, he was true to his aim. He dignified the language, too, by his discussion of its evolutionary aspect. And he was a pioneer in the transfiguration still potential but not yet fulfilled – of Rhetoric into a truly humanist subject.

Nor was Blair alone here – nor even the most revolutionary. Two other late eighteenth-century writers on Rhetoric, Kames (*Elements of Criticism*, 1761) and Campbell (*Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 1776), are more radical than Blair in their treatment of the subject. Kames makes a better attempt to judge writers by their own standards – his criticism is 'more original and independent.' Campbell even goes so far as to show that the function of criticism is not something mysteriously settled before criticism started and therefore not worth discussing, and that questions like the Value of Rules, and the difference between judging by feelings and judging by rules, must be clearly known before criticism is attempted at all. Kames and Campbell are of the greatest importance in the history of criticism. But in this History, in

*Literis Anglicis*, Blair is the man. He was of the kind which begets Movements, and enlists Followers: and as often happens with such, the bad old things in his work were more imitated than the good new ones.

The old habits of a discredited rhetoric of which he was unable to rid himself blossomed into life again through his influence.

'Improve the following sentences,' he cannot help saying in his text-book: or 'What is wrong with the following?' *I had several men die in my ship of calentures* – he quotes Swift, and then comes forward, with respectful eagerness, Lit. Ang.-wise, to correct him: 'who died,' it ought to be, he says. Or Blair will foist authoritatively on to his New Subject (it has never been able to cast them off since) such remnants of the bad old rhetoric as cut-and-dried discussion of the 'style périodique' and the 'style coupé.' 'Mix the two,' he says, thereby handing on that rhetorician's dogma of Variety to twentieth-century matric. students. Or he talks of that never defined 'importance of melody.' Then there is his bold criticism of A by the standards of B – e.g. he maintains that Shakespeare's success was wonderful, inexplicable, considering his 'constant transgression of [rhetoric-made] rules.' All is set forth in the face of a total absence of a theory of value, much less a self-evolved Principle, for measuring-rod. Discrimination seems to him a feeling merely, taste a 'power' – 'of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and art.' Or he makes himself arbiter of the truth-to-nature of Shakespeare's characters without being

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able to claim to have any clear impressions of men himself, nor even any derived notion of psychology, summing up the whole subject by saying that Shakespeare 'excelled in passion.'

It is possible to trace a surprising variety of modern Lit habits to Blair. Here is to be found a very early expression of the typical dogma that the Age of Pope deserves reprimand for its 'neglect of Nature.' Here is to be found for the first time that Indignation against the English Augustans for their deficiency in kindliness, for their satire; here is the assumption that satire is 'non-creative.' In this Age, complains Blair, 'nothing was in vogue but an affected brilliancy . . . and Waller's gay sprightliness was mistaken for the tender spirit of love poetry.' Or he attacks the pastoral:

a good poet ought to give us such a landscape as a painter could copy after . . . he should set before us . . . such features of an object as, on first view, strike and warm the fancy.

(With Lit's astounding discovery that the above is emphatically not the aim of pastoral, no one has ever been found to disagree.) And then at the same time Blair adopts that dogma which the School was to find so cramping in its earliest days, that the right object of poetry was to 'instruct,' meaning by 'instruction' moral discourses, not to say sermons, of the kind Shakespeare was so unfortunately deficient in, but which, says Blair, are one of the strongest merits of *Robinson Crusoe*.

Blair's eloquence, personality, and influence were greater than the intrinsic merits of these discourses. The printed version of them sold, and was re-issued in annotated editions in the nineteenth century.

*Bain*

It is rather difficult, at first, to trace the line of evolution. Blair was before his time: it was only the solidity of his reputation that made his academic innovation acceptable. The chair at Edinburgh, after his departure, lost its interest, fell into disuse. There is a long pause. But the possibility of such a chair had been established: seeds had been sown which were developing in the South: and when at last the right teacher came to revive Scottish interest in the subject, even though he belonged to another university there was already in Scotland the necessary air of ancient establishment about the subject and it was never allowed to drop again.

The pause before the second, greater leader seemed to increase his effect. The words of the Report are dispassionate:

From the time of the fusion of the two Aberdeen Universities in 1860, when Logic was first taught as a subject separate from Moral Philosophy, the subject of English, chiefly English Composition, was taught by the Professor of Logic. . . . To teach 'English' was, in fact, part of the official duty of the Logic Professor. The first Professor of Logic, Professor Bain, who was appointed in 1860, occupied the chair for twenty years, and during the whole of this time lectured, as is well known, on

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English Composition. But he did more than this, he illustrated his detailed composition lectures by frequent references to English prose and poetry in extract books compiled by himself and published for the use of his class.

The teaching of English, it must be noticed, was still incidental to the teaching of something else (much of the most effective teaching is). Moreover, in this case, it was incidental not even to rhetoric, but to logic, which proves nothing except that Bain was an unconventional teacher, allowed to do much what he liked with his own syllabus.

Bain is the man. If Blair was the father of Lit. Ang. teaching, Bain filled it with life, made it permanent. It was Bain who by his sharpness, his stimulating precision, his famous definite character, sent his pupils off down this new exciting by-path of learning, 'opening up a new world,' says one of his pupils,<sup>1</sup> 'to us who knew classics only . . . the mysteries of style . . . Poetry as a Fine Art . . . and then at our debating society sending us into discussions of Dryden, Pope and Tennyson. . . .'

Bain made once-famous books of his lectures, and wrote an autobiography in which he explains the genesis of his English class ('which was entirely new'). 'An endeavour was made, in the concluding weeks [of the Logic course], to give a summary of the English authors – which could hardly be called a course of literature, but, so far as it went, amounted to the same thing – that is to say, gave

<sup>1</sup> W. S. Bruce, *Reminiscences of Seventy Years*.

dates of the authors, the list of their works, and the recognised specialities of their style . . . the line of instruction took more and more the form of analysis of exemplary passages, carried on side by side with the enunciation of principles and maxims of criticism . . .’ Perfect Lit, the reader will say – but he cannot see the excitedly pioneering atmosphere of the class, or the pride with which its members pointed out their teacher in the street as he walked by (ran, rather: eternal busyness is one of the marks of this kind of good teacher). They cannot understand the nervousness with which new pupils approached him, the care with which they had read his text-book first, and the keen way in which, during early days in the class, they were put up beforehand to the correct answer to a certain question, a certain set question, which Bain always asked English composition students:

*Take the following sentence,* he would ask them.

On whatever side we contemplate Homer, what principally strikes us is his invention.

Before ever the students got to his class, they knew what the answer had to be. *The adverbial adjuncts . . . the suspense . . . the splendid way in which the essential word was reserved to the end . . . how it came as a key, right at the end, to unlock the meaning. . . .*

Or there was the stir when Bain brought out a new English grammar, and how it was given out that the book would answer all the questions in the bursary competition (matriculation examination).

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People outside the university, outside education, might not be able to appreciate him, might think that he was overrated, or that he held forth too much, as Carlyle thought, saying that Bain was 'well enough if you keep him off his "cerebration" balderdash, which I did.' (Bain happened to be a pioneer of the teaching of psychology<sup>1</sup> as well.) But with his books, his personality, and his reputation, it can be said that Bain gave the first real life to the teaching of English, and the teaching of literature as well. He is an education pioneer if only because he was the kind of man who liked to create syllabuses and reorganise old studies. Some of his suggestions might well be used for the improvement of some of the literature programmes followed to-day. He had no special preference for the more ancient writers simply because they are more ancient. 'Hooker and Bacon and Temple were in their day great writers of prose; but, for our purpose, they are surpassed by Burke and Hall and Macaulay.' Macaulay! Contrast the modern courses which regard anything later than 1850 as cranky. Bain seemed to see, too, as in a vision, the chains which the editor was about to forge. Of Pattison's 'excellent notes on the *Essay on Man*' he says that

<sup>1</sup> And of many other things. The number of books to his name, and the number of editions through which they once passed, makes the present eclipse of his fame seem remarkably complete. In 1876 William James could write: 'The two philosophers of indubitably the widest influence in England and America since Mill's death are Messrs Bain and Spencer.' Now, 60 years later, he suffers the fate of all mechanical-explanation philosophers and is regarded only as a curio.

they 'are a mixture of literary criticism, philosophy, ethics, and religion, which I do not object to in my miscellaneous reading, but should decidedly object to in the instruction of a class.' Living as he did before the tradition was established, it seems to have been easier for him to foresee some of its dangers. He is near the centre of a problem, for instance, when he says that: 'We may admire Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton and Pope, but they are not the one thing needful in an English class. . . . Not one of these writers is child's play. . . . None of them can be read with any tolerable enjoyment before eighteen or twenty: and the full enjoyment of them is much later.' A point from which all discussion of literature courses ought to start.

Now, in these early, spring-like times, might the study of literature have been moulded out of the plan and principle natural to it. Bain was even conscious of this. 'Holding as I do strong views on the division of labour in teaching,' he would 'keep the study of literature to the study of literature.' This ascetic principle was rigidly adhered to in his lectures. Because seventeen-year-old students were too immature to follow Shakespeare's profoundest developments, Bain was for cutting out the personal altogether. Indeed, he was for omitting 'everything extraneous.' Hence his objection to the historical, sociological comments of Pattison in his notes on Pope. The authors in Bain's composition book are subdivided under 'Allegory,' 'Trisyllabic Verse,' 'Innuendo,' etc.

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The History of Literature, narrowed to its strict domain, is the criticism of literary works in all that relates to style or composition.

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The same rigid principle of division of labour would exclude from English teaching whatever relates to the history, manners and customs of the country, and all occasions for calling forth patriotic and moral sentiment. Such matters obviously belong to historical and other teaching, and should not be encroached upon by the English master any more than by the Drawing master.

The question of the validity of this principle belongs to Opinion, not History. I am pointing out now that Bain was thus formative, thus an originator, and yet in his chief dogma most under the dominion of the old, decadent aftermath of mediæval rhetorical teaching – the concentration on devices, style-habits, to the exclusion of the question of the success of these styles as instruments of self-expression. ‘We cannot, of course,’ he repeats, ‘inculcate good English diction without referring to English writers, and every writer must treat of a subject.’ What must we do, asks Bain. We must *leave out the subject*. Leave out everything, till only treatment is left. Never even discuss the degree of effectiveness of the treatment, because that would involve the Aims of the writer. Bacon, says Bain, is a bad man to study because he is all subject. . . . Macaulay, on the other hand, is good, because there is a much larger proportion of treatment to subject matter.

He refuses to compare *writers* with each other – he

does not, for instance, compare Keats with Shelley, nor even what Keats is writing about with what Shelley is writing about. Yet paradoxically and contradictorily he thinks it correct to describe how their treatment of *the same subject differs*, e.g. Shelley and Keats on Birds – the ‘Ode to the Skylark’ and that other ornithological Ode, to the Nightingale, of Keats. ‘Keats,’ Bain thinks, ‘even surpasses Shelley . . . the happiness of the bird is not over-done in the same glaring style.’ It is perfectly allowable to note the advantages of Meiosis over Hyperbole.<sup>1</sup>

Thus does this vigorous teacher, capable of implanting permanent enthusiasms in his pupils, keep his great new subject, like Blair before him, painfully tethered to the old.

*Aytoun. Nichol. Minto. Masson*

Bain . . . Aytoun . . . Nichol . . . Masson . . . Minto . . . Saintsbury – from now the line is unbroken. Gradually, out of the teaching of composition grew the teaching of English Literature: but for long the ban of Bain, inherited from the rhetoricians, remained. Never was the writer to be considered; only the treatment. In his words:

What makes the History is the regarding of our English authors in a connected series, each having more or less relation to the preceding. This historical treatment of Literature is itself a branch of the Belles Lettres, being always conducted with studious regard to the graces of composition. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Bain does not forget to bring in Wordsworth’s odes on the lark and the cuckoo, Logan’s on the cuckoo.

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This concept of writers, or, rather, their books, as members of a series (with all the nineteenth-century ideology of evolution behind it) – this vision of literature as a progressing organism, with devices always improving and multiplying, determines the youthful character of the New Subject.

In Edinburgh, a little later than Bain at Aberdeen, Aytoun revived interest in Blair's chair of Rhetoric. Aytoun (1813–64), besides writing for Blackwood's, was a fascinating Lit curiosity himself, being the very last of the Romantic Revival poets, composing Lays of the Cavaliers, and pre-Tennysonian Ballads.<sup>1</sup> He was almost entirely a Composition specialist. He held it a great wrong that students should be most ignorant in the 'knowledge of their own language.' He had a following; and under him the numbers of students began to increase.<sup>2</sup> It is to be noted that this increase was due partly to a first influx of those champion supporters of the New School, women students.

More truly in the line of Bain, another teacher of the sharp and unforgettably incisive kind, the sort of man to be reverently mentioned in the memoirs of his pupils, was Professor Nichol, of Glasgow. Though somewhat later than Bain (he *fl.* 1862–89) he belonged to a university with an earlier Lit tradition and honourable interest in the subject. Well

<sup>1</sup> He was also, Lit might point out, the first of the later nineteenth-century parodists. See Gosse's *More Books on the Table*, Index entry 'Aytoun.'

<sup>2</sup> From 30 in 1846 to upwards of 150 at his death.

before the beginning of the century, its Professor of Humanity, William Richardson, had written his most notable Essays on Shakespeare's Dramatic Characters. And there were other literary connections, back-door entrances. These Scottish teachers were especially stimulating in their asides, in their illustrations from subjects outside their own department. In the eighteen-fifties, after English Literature had been included among the many subjects in the M.A. examination but before its chair was founded, students received incidental relief from the academic dryness of their literary text-book (Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric*) in the lectures and advice of Dr. Robert Buchanan ('Logic Bob') who brought English into his philosophy lectures in a delightful way, and set his students enthusiastically reading the English Classics. When John Nichol was appointed to the chair of English in 1862, there was already an air of interested expectancy, a pioneering atmosphere, a renaissance feeling. Nichol kept this alive, and the interest certainly did not end with his famous successors, A. C. Bradley, Raleigh.

These great beginnings seem to belong more to Glasgow and Aberdeen than to Edinburgh. In Aberdeen, Bain was succeeded by another born explainer, clear and sharp, the pigeon-holing Minto.

His main class-work was still with Logic, but he did not confine himself to English Composition, giving his students not only a general sketch of the whole field of English Literature, but often dealing particularly and critically with particular authors. . . .

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Yet all still in the Bain tradition. And with even wider influence on the new Lit, for his two books, on English poets and English prose writers respectively, became text-books for more than a decade. 'Dealing particularly with the authors,' of course, needs qualification. Minto was a triple prizeman, a triple first; he had been a truly 'brilliant' student, with triply convoluted brain. And now he turned these great powers of human understanding which he had inherited – not to a struggle to explore and understand new consciousnesses, different consciousnesses, but to catalogue the literary habits of writers. How often the sentence was periodic, how often loose. The proportion of similes to metaphors. Making lists, in fact – only of course more elaborately, with more concentration, than it had ever been done before. And all of it, thus done as if for the first time, was very clarifying and stimulating to the young students *In Literis Anglicis*.

Meanwhile, in Edinburgh, the atmosphere is less keen. Aytoun had been succeeded in '65 by Masson: and Masson, Professor of Literature for so many years, overhung the school rather than led it. Coming from London, from University College, he stood for a different tradition. Perhaps it was this that helped him to introduce a certain new element which must be associated with him. For he had not the prestige of Bain or Nichol, he did not start those infectious enthusiasms which sent the pupils of these great men rushing off to read books, or to write them.

But reports differ, here. Official tributes, cele-

bration tributes, say that Masson was perhaps the most outstanding and popular figure in the Tercenary year, and there is talk of his immense 'vigour and gusto,' and the 'power of phrase that made his lectures literature.' Barrie, also, speaks of his patriarchal appearance ('the image of Carlyle'), and asserts that all his students determined to dedicate their first works to him. Then, on the other side again, there is his nickname 'the dray-horse of literature.' Later in his long academic life, his lectures certainly became more mechanical, more of a laborious repetition of former discourses. 'Why aren't you listening?' he is supposed once to have asked a student. Legendary answer: - 'I've got my grandfather's notes, sir.'

Masson was not in the Bain tradition - and here he must be considered as Lit. Ang. inaugurator. Masson did not believe in 'style only'. He believed in the discussion of writers themselves. And here might Masson, with due prayers and consecration of spirit, have boldly taken hold of this most debated theme, and taught literature as the expression of Men, taught the art of writing as the art of breaking down confusing barriers of words between individuals, between men. Now at this moment might Lit. Ang. have been turned into a truly humanist subject. . . . But I am inserting Opinion into History. At any rate, it was 'might have' only. Masson talked of the Writer, but in a way which to say the least of it was limited. It is a way which has infected the whole School ever since.

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Masson believed in making his lectures 'interesting.' 'It will be my effort,' said Masson in his Inaugural, 'to give to our studies of English Literature that connectedness, that systematised form, which befits an academic, as distinct from a merely popular course. But . . .'

There was a 'but.' Masson goes on to say how necessary *interest* is as a motive to learning. Where, he says, is interest to be found, if not in our own historians, orators and poets, and the lives they led, and the works they have left behind them?

Interest . . . lives they have led. The dangers are obvious, the danger of the paralysis of the pleasantly painful unfolding processes of education by the admixture of such things as newsy personal details of the great, and all done under the flag of an apparently good cause – Reference to the Writer. The omission of Bain and the Rhetoricians was to be supplied, but by a substitute, a fake. Masson was known to be a friend of Carlyle and of other great men in London. Anecdotal scraps from these quarters would undoubtedly add effect to his lectures. And the kind of treatment he used in his *Memoirs of London in the Forties* was doubtless repeated when he lectured on 'Carlyle Personally,' as it was in the lectures which he published as 'Shakespeare Personally.'

So the existence of the writer was acknowledged at last. But only 'personally' – and we see here the beginnings of the teaching of that strange Lit psychology we have described, that turning of great writers into interesting or lovable characters, and

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the describing of their qualities in terms of one man's very human ideal of what writers ought to be like. In his appreciation of Masson, Barrie describes this ideal of his appreciatively. 'By a man of letters he does not mean the poet, for instance, who is all soul, so much as the strong-brained writer whose guardian angel is a fine sanity. He used to mention John Skelton, . . . Sir David Lindsay.' Masson was a great pipe smoker. Barrie quotes his lecture on Chatterton Personally. 'Had the poet mixed a little more in company – and smoked, his morbidness could not have poisoned him.' Lit is getting under way at last.

### *King Saintsbury*<sup>1</sup>

After Masson, the Edinburgh School increased in numbers and fame: for the very spirit of Lit had produced a new champion, a king, an emperor.

1895 saw the coming of George Edward Bateman Saintsbury.

Saintsbury is certainly the most powerful of all this dynasty. Not because he was revolutionary – he would never have concentrated on the new kind of personal element beginning to be authorised by Masson. On the contrary, tradition, in even a narrow sense, was everything to him: he belonged to the age when one was born conservative or liberal, he felt himself to be born conservative, and that was that: at the age of ten he wrote a prize poem on

<sup>1</sup> These pages are based on a paper read by me to members of the Saintsbury Society, and are reproduced here by their kind permission.

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Sicily which contained a denunciation of Garibaldi (Gladstone at the Speechday distribution said that he was 'afraid he could not agree with the sentiments'). But Saintsbury is a power, an emblem, because though he followed the eighteenth-century rhetoricians in concentrating on the outward appearances of writing and never on what or who was being expressed, he did this consciously, from a motive, as part of a belief.

His rise to imperial rank may have been helped by what must have seemed an unlucky accident. As a young man, Saintsbury, his genial capacities for savouring literature and learning already developed, his love of tradition already marked, seemed cut out for a comfortable Oxford Fellowship. But there was an unexpected hitch. He took what was then called a 'smash' – a second class – in Greats.<sup>1</sup> Saintsbury felt this deeply. 'A second always *hurts* so abominably,' he said. Literary men feel, probably with justice, that Keats or Shakespeare, if they took a literary school, would be most likely to get a Fourth; just conceivably they might get Alpha plus plus plus on every paper: but never by any possible chance could they get a Second.

The Fellowship did not come. But this reverse was to call up new and unexpected qualities. Saintsbury felt the need to justify himself, and the necessity of earning his living.

<sup>1</sup> In spite of an education under Ingram Bywater's Dr. Mayor, of King's College, Strand – a teacher famous for inspiring enthusiasm for the classics.

For a time he taught, rather miserably, at a school in Guernsey. Then he returned to London.

Since the war, Saintsbury has been less recommended to students. A temporary thing. . . . Saintsbury is not what they call 'minute' enough for current ideals of scholarship. But all servants of literature know and consult Saintsbury, know that pages of every library catalogue are pasted with his name, and have heard the legend of Saintsbury in retirement in Bath, where stands the Crescent in a bay window of which Saintsbury's white beard was to be seen, in the mornings, still prodigiously active over his typewriter. We know at any rate his portrait, of an old man with book-quenched eyes. What we forget is the gusto, the excitement, with which a Saintsbury younger than it is possible for us to imagine him seized on the great virgin field of Literature. The feverishness of gold-rush days was in the air then. On the one side were new veins of Middle English Literature, recently opened by Skeat and the philologists. On the other were the delicious tracts of unedited English classics. To start with, Saintsbury had to be content with articles and reviews – from first to last he reckoned that he had filled 100 volumes octavo with these alone.<sup>1</sup> But soon the reprints began. 'Edited, with an introduction and notes by G. E. B. S.' turned up year after year, quarter after quarter. Swift, Montaigne, Her-

<sup>1</sup> He was one of the 'old gang' on the *Saturday Review*, before Frank Harris took over.

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rick, Fielding, *Sir Charles Grandison*, Sterne (6 vols.), Smollett, Peacock, *Pride and Prejudice* – and then, after the editions, the histories. It is in these histories that the unique Saintsbury attitude to literature appears. It is virgin country to be fenced; it is an unmapped waste, every outpost of which there is some compulsion to visit. Not only the whole of English, and all the details of its periods separately, but the framework of French Literature is here as well, and there are prolonged raids on the Italians (the Flourishing of Romance) and a complete conspectus of Spain (the rise of Allegory). English Prose is brought under the flag, and the furthest margins of English Prose Rhythm.

The specialist had become the generaliser – and yet, by an extraordinary self-discipline, he had managed to remain a specialist at the same time. Rival editors began to complain. Churton Collins, especially, accused him of ‘commenting on works which he could not even have inspected.’ No criticism could be more off the mark. Saintsbury made a special point of touching, opening, and at any rate reading *in* works to which he only refers in a footnote. He would be worth post-mortem examination if only because it is certain that he read more than any man who has ever lived. When he says, dealing with the three-thousand-four-hundredth name in his History of Criticism (Chapter *Later German* Subsection *Heine* Intersubsection *Heine’s Followers*) that Grillparzer’s ‘natural limitations appear to have been further tightened by his playwrightship and by

the influence of Joseph Schreyvogel, a sort of Austrian Nisard, of whom I do not know so much,' readers will realise that Saintsbury is at least as familiar with Schreyvogel as they are with, say, *Paradise Regained*, if not *Samson Agonistes*. Reading was the chief labour of his enormous life. It is recorded, for example, that for 18 years he *started the day* by reading a French novel (in preparation for his history of them) – an act so unnatural to man as almost in itself to amount to genius. And the notion that any one who wrote so much criticism could not possibly have done his proportion of reading is ludicrously anthropomorphic judgment. For Saintsbury in his powers of work was godlike.

Late in the 'nineties, even his scholastic reputation was beginning to grow high. He was chosen to succeed Masson in what was still far the most important of the Literature Chairs.

The question must now be asked, was Saintsbury as successful as a teacher as he was in those other fields in which we know him so much better?

It would be foolishly unjust to his reputation to say that he was. As a teacher in Edinburgh, he was suspect from the start, because he had not been born in Scotland. Needless to say, he had written the best monographs on Wilson, Jeffrey and Lockhart. He was working on Scott. He was able, also, to appreciate the Edinburgh knowledge of claret. But he came from the South.

Horrible things sometimes happen to lecturers who come from the South. The students may take a

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dislike to you. Not long before Saintsbury's time, a literary lecturer at Glasgow, a Southerner who had just been appointed, delivering his Inaugural to an audience who prevented him from once hearing the sound of his own voice, went straight back to London, wrote a letter to *The Times* about 'Scottish barbarians,' and was never heard of again. Nothing comparable to this happened to Saintsbury. But the lectures to the big Edinburgh Pass classes are trying affairs. Aliens from other faculties drift in. Literature was still thought of as rather a freak subject – almost a comic subject. There were interruptions. There were times when Saintsbury became as irritated as his interrupters hoped he would.

Saintsbury continued to be irritated, but he stuck most conscientiously to his work. Later, it is possible to trace a slight increase of impatience in the growing sarcasm of his examination questions:

*Without* remarking that the thing became a trumpet in his hands, say something relevant about Milton's Sonnets. . . .

His attitude to the average student became one of slightly sarcastic tolerance.

Saintsbury never completely fitted in to these academic surroundings. A kind of A,B,C, clarity is necessary to get the better of classes of this kind: and Saintsbury was the most indefinite of lecturers. He spoke from skeleton notes only, from little cards, with rather indecipherable headings written across them. It is said that there was 'some terrible dis-

order in the talk, with loose ends, pick-ups, recoveries, allusive asides.' He was not impressive, nor was he precise. The whole was delivered in a level, high-pitched voice, a continuous stream, 'unemphatic and unpausing.' Yet with individuals, with small groups of Honours students, he was very good. These students now praise him high. To them he was a personality – even vigorous, anti-academic, half-swashbuckling, almost Elizabethan, anti-pedant.

But there is another characteristic of Saintsbury, more fundamental than his lack of Literature Lecturer's tricks, to account for this partial failure – his attitude to his subject.

Younger, post-war students, to whom 'Saintsbury' was a name from the past, were surprised to see that only a few years before his death his name appeared attached to articles in a young intellectual Monthly *The Dial*. But there was no inconsistency whatever. Young intellectual magazines devoted to Art usually, in the twenties at any rate, followed Yellow Book principles: they concerned themselves with Art for Art's Sake; for them 'treatment' was the thing, never the subject, nor the man: and this Art *pour l'Art* was precisely the concern of Saintsbury. If he would never have accepted himself as a typical production of the Wilde era, he preached the same doctrines. In a paper of 1926 on 'Technique' he claims that 'for more than half a century he has done his little best to accentuate the importance of treatment over that of mere subject.'

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What a book is *about* means for him something as trivial as *what bedside motto does it contain*. Saintsbury, in fact, is the literary professor of the Æsthetic Period, standing out above the rest because in his case there is no slipping into littish talk about treatment to conceal a barbarous knowledge of man, life, and the motives of Genius: he writes thus because he has chosen to do so. His *History of Criticism*, though everybody is put in, is really a history of taste, of *what* people thought *what* 'good' or 'bad' *when*: it is not, and never could have been, an account of the men who re-created past writers for their own generation, as Coleridge re-created Shakespeare. In the preface to this almost incredibly ground-covering work, Saintsbury sets down his beliefs, defending himself against a friend who had accused him of 'treating literature as something by itself':

I hastened to admit the impeachment, and to declare that this is the very postulate of my book. That literature cannot be *absolutely* isolated, I agree. . . . But in that *comparative* isolation and separate presentation which Aristotle meant by his caution against confusion of kinds I do thoroughly agree.

But Saintsbury carried impersonality even further than this. Not only the motives of writers ought to be ignored, he says, but the principles on which their art is grounded. He is scornful of enquiries into the basis of things because, he says, such enquiries are mechanical.<sup>1</sup> To see more in a work of Art than its

<sup>1</sup> e.g., All enquiries into the physical, or physiological, basis of metre, are to Saintsbury "metaprosodic," outside the field.

form, its characteristics, is to Saintsbury 'Metaphysics' – always for him a Pity – and such attempts make him think sympathetically of a favourite quotation from Dr. Johnson about a set of men 'who account for everything systematically. For instance, it has been a fashion to wear scarlet breeches; these men would tell you that according to causes and effects no other wear could at that time have been chosen.'

Saintsbury, in a word, is the Apostle of Taste, stands for taste: and the question arises – can you *teach* taste? The answer seems to be, on the whole, that Yes, you can. But whether you can *examine* in taste – that is another matter altogether. Apparently experiments are now being made; but broadly speaking, the only examinable facts of Literature are dates, personal characteristics of writers, and dicta on the subject of How it Works. A,B,C, dates and doctrines is what the poor literature student must, therefore, have, and what he therefore, with stern pencil pointed over his open notebook, demands from his teacher. This was exactly the kind of information which Saintsbury refused to give. It must have been as impossible to make note material out of his lectures as it is out of his books. He was always actually attacking what he called the 'horse-leeches of definition,' and the one rule of art he was anxious to impart was that there was no rule.

The pros and cons of this important and ancient question could not be adequately summarised in a

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volume. But in my opinion, so far as Saintsbury is concerned, this stern rejection of his, which makes him as narrow in his judgment of criticism as he is satisfyingly catholic in his criticism of art, is a limitation.

This subjugation of the personal element seems to have been carried even against himself. In some ways, despite all his informality, he seems to be one of the most intangible writers that ever lived. It is impossible to say, in his criticism, which are his favourite authors. The novelists? – but then his major work was on prosody and criticism. The writers of the eighteenth century – but what of his two books on the nineteenth? And so on. Has he no gaps? If he has a preconception it is, I think, that poetry should be Wordsworthian, Romantic, of high seriousness. This would make him antipathetic to Byron, and in fact it does; but even with Byron he performs astounding feats in the concealing of the pre-judgment. ‘I have read Byron again and again,’ he writes, ‘and I have sometimes, by reading Byron only and putting a strong constraint upon myself, got very nearly in the mood to enjoy him.’

This personal ghostliness helps, I think, to account for his style, which, since the style is the man and in this case there is no man, is a non-style.<sup>1</sup> No literary device of any kind, hackneyed or otherwise, is used.

<sup>1</sup> He has pooled the vocabularies of the thousand writers inside him – though he has added undeniably original words of his own: ‘auto-schediastic, concionatory, ephectic, indagation, ineption, to-deled, tritical.’

The same explanation, I think, will account for the difference between Saintsbury criticising – all sensitive vitality, humour, shrewdness – and Saintsbury writing on his own, in a ‘Scrap Book,’ for instance. Here, all the Saintsburian wealth seems to depart. It is strange, because his tone of voice is then more robust than ever – quite Falstaffianly jolly. Turning through ‘Scrap Book’ pages I see almost at once a sentence which may explain what I mean – a note on H. D. Traill:

He had a most agreeable laugh for other people’s jokes as well as his own. And I always like to think of him as I once saw him, then perhaps the most formidable of all-round fighters in the Press in English journalism, sitting cross-legged in flannels, at his wife’s feet on their lawn at Putney – just after a set at tennis, and discarding, with his laugh, a finished joram of lemon squash.

The description is cheerful, the use of the anti-cliché word ‘joram’ is at least characteristic. Yet what has been said? It gives almost no picture. Saintsbury seems to be *refusing* to give a personal impression.

And this deficiency of course impedes his criticism. There is no actual Saintsbury against which he can measure all these writers. There is nobody there to catch fire, nor be quenched, nor feel strongly one way or the other.

I often think, when I contemplate Saintsbury, of Bacon’s essay where he says ‘Reading maketh a full man.’ What does Bacon mean? Is it a compliment? Saintsbury is, must have been, full. Yet to those who never saw him this wealth seems unreal. True

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one can see even a sort of Elizabethanism in his style – it is like Nash: but some clue seems to be missing. Saintsbury was full: he knew the good things of these writers he had loaded himself with: he could even well over with a fine thought <sup>1</sup> But one cannot feel, distinctly, that it is Saintsbury who has spoken. If there are riches within, their texture seems to be as unaltered by what he reads as the texture of the cistern by its contents. There is no incorporation. His eagerness is equally measured whether he is talking about Wordsworth or Stephen Duck, the criticism in a minor Puritan pamphlet, or in Matthew Arnold. He writes even of the greatest with amiable connoisseurship, as if humorously apologising for his collector's mania. The possibility that the reading of books may result in a personal influence; that, to use a trite phrase, by the satisfaction of the desire for beauty individuality may be enriched – this does not seem to have occurred to him. I am *not* suggesting that individuality may be enriched by new political views – but it may be that Saintsbury was permanently affected by the shock of having once heard Rossetti say that a certain rather bad volume of poems ought to be praised 'because it was on the right side.' Well, that kind of criterion was never to be his. The great English writers are on the whole in the liberal tradition.

<sup>1</sup> e.g.: 'There is in the region of the Arts a point in which it differs . . . from other regions: nothing is absolute, nothing modern. Everything is an expression of the undying human mind. What has been, has been, and therefore is.'

Saintsbury must have read nearly 500 Sonnets to Liberty, 600 Odes on the Emancipation of Slaves, and about 7000 different kinds of eloquent condemnation of Church and State. Yet with the most amiable recognition of the literary qualities of these pieces, he remained to the end of his life a Tory of the kind that was always expecting, as soon as the right kind of government came along, a repeal of the Reform Bill of 1832.

Arnold Bennett often used to scratch his head over the problem of Saintsbury. Here I read these little introductions of his to the Balzac novels, he would say, and *every one* hits the nail on the head. It is impossible. It is not right that he should be familiar with such secrets – because the man was not a writer himself. This genial mock-criticism gives rather a true picture. Though by himself Saintsbury may have been a ghost, Saintsbury became exquisitely alive in the context of somebody else. Early in life it was borne in on him, he says, that he was not meant to be a creative writer. He very calmly and unswervingly determined to be the next best thing.

The power of Saintsbury is in these moments of perception, in these sensations. His reading was in advance of his experience. This prevented him from being a creative artist – from being a creative critic, even. But he *was* this next best thing, an apprehender of, and a pointer towards, the beauty created by others. Perhaps we ought to be glad, instead of sorry, that finding himself not to be one of those few

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elect capable of founding a philosophy on their own experience, he refused to re-arrange his judgments to pattern with the metaphysics of others. Here, I think, Saintsbury might be allowed his own, more eloquent, last word. I will quote from a passage in which he defends himself from the charge of not having made enough use of Æsthetics in the *History of Criticism*:

I do not know, and I do not believe that any one knows, however much he may juggle with terms – why certain words arranged in a certain order stir one like the face of the sea, or like the face of a girl, while other arrangements leave one absolutely indifferent or excite boredom. . . . And just as physicists and biologists, and all the 'ologies that ever were 'ologised, leave you utterly uninformed as to the real reason of the rapture of the physical kiss, so I think that æsthetics do not teach the reason of the amorous peace of the Poetic Moment.

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With Saintsbury, the new subject was fairly established. Now it is time to look farther South, where a very different kind of Lit settlement had been less obtrusively taking root while these more sensational innovations had been filling the news in the North.

Nothing could be more different, in the nineteenth century, than the academic atmosphere of London and Scotland. To start with, London has never shared the Scottish passion for education for its own sake. Or it may be that in London the University was new, in Scotland, ancient. It may be that London was too conscious of juniority, having always associated 'University' with Oxford or Cambridge exclusively, whereas Scotland, particularly and articulately in the nineteenth century, had shown a notable lack of reverence for these institutions. However this may be there was an impression – and its shadow exists still, or is only now being removed – that London University was chiefly useful as a short cut to a degree. And indeed 'degree-hunters' is a fair description of a proportion of its nineteenth-century students. This perfectly rational attitude had to be catered for; and as is well known the demand was met by a rather mechanically efficient organisation of examinations, examinations not of the tutored by the tutor, but of anonymous, num-

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bered candidates (with whom the examiner had probably had no contact) by a Board. From its very consciousness of want of status, the new University's tests were never (as they often were at Oxford) mere formalities. Because the London degree was likely to be suspect from the start, in order to 'keep up the standard,' examination was made a more rigid test here than anywhere else.

Not without conscious pride, London was the first University to introduce English, and English Literature, into this examination system. University College was founded in 1826, King's in 1829, the amalgamation into 'London University' took place in 1836. By 1839 –

Mention Wallis's well-known rule for the use of *shall* and *will* in the different persons . . .

Examination questions had started –

Does the line of Byron, 'I ought to do and did my best,' appear to you to contain a solecism?

Both these quotations come from the English paper of the first matriculation examination. As the University Calendar says:

One innovation in the traditional practice of Universities in awarding degrees in the Faculty of Arts was adopted from the first in the Matriculation Examination by the recognition of the English language as a necessary branch of study in addition to Latin and Greek.

Twenty years later, English Literature was incorporated as well, at a date when even in Scotland, so

far as examinations were concerned, Literature was the most unofficial of side-illustrations to Rhetoric, and had only a little recognition in its own right. In 1859 these strange words were printed in an examination paper, presage of even stranger things to come:

From Homer to Scott, 'smiles through tears' have been a favourite subject of poetical description. How are they described in *Lear*?

For the first time English Literature appeared in a B.A. course. For the first time, there had been English texts specified for this year – the Set Books. Bacon, *Essays*; Shakespeare, *King Lear*. Examinations *In Literis Anglicis* had started.

It might all have begun even earlier, but for a series of rather uninspiring Professors. In London the right teacher cannot be counted on to turn up, as he can be in Scotland, to provide the necessary winds of enthusiasm to blow a new subject into motion. At first, there was no special English lecturer at King's College:

The third regular professorship – viz. that of English Literature and History – was (no doubt for reasons of economy) left vacant. Its duties were divided between the professors of classics and mathematics – Professor Anstice was to lecture once a week on literature, his lectures to consist mainly of readings from edifying authors. . . .

('Edifying' seems to mean 'not from Byron,' in whose works it was only proper to see traces of the devil in the form of grammatical solecisms.) The

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lecturing was to be intermittent, and that little teaching to be 'improving.'

'Edifying,' emphatically, was the Professor of English Language and Literature<sup>1</sup> already installed at University College. The Rev. Thomas Dale started at U.C. in 1828, then founded a school (in which the boy Ruskin was a pupil), and then, in the 'thirties, transferred himself to King's. Altogether he was a great setter of standards. What these standards were, and how unflinchingly he inherited from Blair (whose rhetoric course he edited) the notion that the purpose of literature was 'to instruct,' we may learn from his own inaugural lecture and from the notes and introductions to the literary books he printed. This Inaugural, as the first lecture of the first 'English Literature' Professor, must be quoted. Canon Dale was only second choice it is true. Southey had been asked, and had refused. Yet Dale was a confident, popular and eloquent preacher, quite able to set a tone which could be imitated by his successors.

All the same, he is apologetic. The innovation is almost too daring. 'Gentlemen,' he starts:

The man who can make his first public appearance in a new and untried character, without some feeling of diffidence and trepidation, must be endowed with peculiar firmness. . . . Gentlemen, under these novel and, to me, most trying circumstances . . .

Describing what he believes to be the purpose of an

<sup>1</sup> Truly *Literature*, for there was already a Professor of Rhetoric and Philology. The Matriculation English questions were exclusively philological.

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English training ('the combination of general and professional education') he is struck with a doubt.

How can I effectively place our English dramatic writers in juxtaposition with the masters of Greek Tragedy, unless I have ascertained that those to whom I speak of, Peele, Marlowe, Fletcher, Jonson, and Massinger, possess some knowledge of their respective works?

Judging from his plan, literature does not seem to have come into it very much after all. There would be (I) History of Language, (II) Philology of Language, and (III) Use and application of Language. Ruskin only remembered of him that he lectured on *Early English Literature*. Judging by the *Student's Guide* of Todd,<sup>1</sup> a work which he admiringly edited, Dale would have had to cross most of the later English writers off his list of possibles before he began. In the words of the *Student's Guide*:

Beware . . . there are beautiful pearls in the bottom of the ocean, but they are found only here and there, and would you feel it worth your while to dive after them, if there were many probabilities that you would stick and die in the mud in which they are imbedded? . . .

'But,' say you, 'has my author ever read Byron and Moore, Hume and Paine, Scott, Bulwer and Cooper?' Yes, he has read them all, and with too much care. He knows every rock and every quicksand: and he solemnly declares to you, that the only good which he is conscious of ever having received from them is, a deep impression that men who possess talent of such compass and power,

<sup>1</sup> Professor R. W. Chambers points out that this Rev. John Todd was the American homomorph of Dale, pioneer of Lit in the States.

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and so perverted in their application, must meet the day of judgment under a responsibility which would be cheaply removed by the price of a world. . . .

No wonder Canon Dale steered clear of literature as much as possible. After all, the eighteen-thirties were the days of the *Keepsakes* and *Literary Souvenirs*, when good literature meant elegant, if not pious literature. An anti-regency, anti-Byronic, embryo Victorian period, was not a healthy atmosphere for this new-born child of education. Canon Dale ends his Inaugural in block capitals:

RELIGION IS DIVINE.

With a sigh of relief he gets back to safer, more familiar ground.

THE CULTIVATION OF THE MIND IS THE SURE GUIDE TO VIRTUE, THE MOST EFFECTIVE AUXILIARY TO RELIGION.

Note already that there is more than one element which London helped to provide for Lit. Ang. Vestiges of Canon Dale's judgment in terms of morality *versus* immorality are still lingering. If London Lit is to be connected chiefly with examinification, Dale's moral doubts have affected this too. One of the chief accompaniments of examinations is the Set Book. But from the first days of the Set Book, a difficulty makes itself felt. There are very few really important works which, studied *in toto*, can be found to agree with the moral criteria of Dales.

To suggest the study of English texts at all needed an especially pioneering kind of courage.

The inaugurator of set books was a great liberal personality, F. D. Maurice, who succeeded Dale at King's College in 1840. Maurice, unlike Dale, was perfectly at home in the atmosphere of innovation. The new University, and the new Subject, was for a few years a canal for his brave revolutionary capacities.

One of the pleasures he promised himself, and a great pleasure it is, was the construing with his classes, not of a classical, but of an English book: the satisfaction of reading through with a class of young men a great English work, introducing them to it, explaining it in detail.

At once, he began to find that there were difficulties. The Dale atmosphere was everywhere. It was necessary to be careful – especially since literature, at this time, was taught as a kind of preliminary to divinity. At first, he had wanted to choose *King John*. But

I was afraid that I should scandalise good people by choosing for my first subject a play, the first act of which would involve either awkward skipping, or what would seem to them very unfit reading for boys.

In the first act of *King John*, not only is a bastard called a bastard, but he is portrayed as a not altogether unsympathetic kind of character. With this kind of standard to maintain, what book could be considered safe? It was in this way that the most

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famous set book of all came to be chosen, for a reason which, in view of more obvious merits, would not now, perhaps, appear so obvious. Thus was selected the great *Prologue*.

Now Chaucer, writes Maurice, they will be obliged, in a measure, to *construe*; there will be an excuse and almost a necessity for strict observation of the words; and at the same time the *Prologue* (which is all I mean to meddle with) . . . I cannot find half a dozen lines in it which the most scrupulous person would object to.

So Maurice decides, providing enough cheap copies were obtainable, that it must be the *Prologue*. From that day to this the *Prologue* it has been, with the fear of a shortage of sixpenny copies never urgent. For indeed it is a perfect book for such a purpose, and the sensitive and serious Maurice might have brought the London Literary school to life with his idea, but for one drawback. He was full of enthusiasm, but he was unable to pass it on: for most of his students, the enthusiasm did not turn out to be infectious. After a time, Maurice began to falter. 'I have just returned from my lecture on The Knight,' he wrote. 'Some of the lads were very attentive, but there was more noise than I liked. I fear I have not hit upon the right way with them, though to myself the lectures are interesting.' For students, he had neither the necessary prestige nor precision. It was said that he could not keep order, that he had no affinities with the young, that he was not clear, that he was entirely devoid of humour.

He would declaim on general principles – generalities always. He tried hard to improve. ‘To-day,’ he says, ‘I merely gave them facts. . . . I really liked this task better than declaiming about greater matters; facts are becoming dearer to me every day.’ But the wish was father to the thought. Archdeacon Farrar, a student at the time, records that he never in his life attended any history lectures ‘in which *facts* were so neglected.’

Here, in embryo, are all the difficulties, the undecided problems, unclear motives, of Lit lecturing. Shall facts be given – text-book facts – or the lecturer’s unpublished generalities on the Meaning of Romance, or the Value of Poetry? Maurice seems to have compromised by sticking to what Coleridge called ‘facts of the mind.’ Coleridge, in fact, is very much part of the explanation of Maurice, who at Cambridge was one of the ‘Apostles’ with Hallam and Tennyson: and the Apostles were banded in almost idolatrous admiration of Coleridge, his style, his thought, and the tradition of his way of lecturing. But the Coleridge way of lecturing and thinking, the syntax of his thought, is the worst of models, however good an instrument Coleridge may have made of it. The power of creating thought while talking is not given to five men in a century, and imitation of such speech becomes the most exasperating of vague, disorganised generalisation, dulling the appetite of the most expectant audiences. There still exists a parody of a Maurice lecture, a sentence of which may be quoted:

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The fourteenth century was preceded by the thirteenth, and followed by the fifteenth. This is a *deep fact*. It is profoundly instructive, and gives food for inexhaustible reflection. It is not, indeed, one of those facts which find their way into popular compendiums, but . . .

It is exactly Coleridge's *tone* when he was at his best – giving new life to the stalest truths, according to his purpose. But without the context in Coleridge, how devastating; and never, never is this kind of thing *simpatico* to young students. This part of Maurice's life was a failure, and before long he seems to have lost interest. He was subjected to terrible ragging: on one occasion a student hid himself under the platform and knocked it with a stick all through the lecture. And soon the weight of educational chains proved too heavy for him. The Authority of academicism began to bear down. Maurice began to want an assistant, and asked for Charles Kingsley: but Kingsley was regarded as altogether too unsafe, too 'broad,' for a University. To his just indignation Maurice was not allowed Kingsley, and soon a famous quarrel began, as a result of which Maurice angrily resigned. It all goes to show that a man who is a good influence in the world at large may not be any influence at all in the world of education.

Some of the later philological professors at London bore distinguished names, but on the whole the university was unlucky in its literature lecturers, suffering a bad run which did not improve till late in the century. The chosen either turned out to be too

pedagogic, or to follow too slavishly the cramming requirements of the degree-hunters, or to be round pegs in square holes – like A. H. Clough, who left Oxford, indignant with its conservative rectitudes, only to find things worse at University College ('Intolerance, O Tom, is not confined to the cloisters of Oxford'). A great exception seems to have been Henry Morley, one of the true teaching personalities (cf. eulogies of W. P. Ker), who enthusiastically mixed real literature study with his language teaching, giving to his students the 'incitement of his own energy . . . and his belief in the inexhaustible value of his subject.'

Nevertheless, in spite of Morley, and one or two others, London's nineteenth-century contribution to the organisation of the New Subject was the typical one of examinification, and examinations not in Literature, but in the strict new *Literis Anglicis*. Looking through the old papers, we see, one by one, the new features arise. Occasionally Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* will be a set book: questions on the 'figures of speech' hang on and on. But the elements of much of the familiar stuff we now know so well can be seen arriving in turn. The evolution follows this kind of line –

(1) Matriculation. English Paper, 1839. 'Correct the following: "It is me," etc.' (Less familiar are some of the authorities cited – 'What explanation does Horne Tooke give of the conjunction *that*? Confirm his theory by instancing similar usages of the corresponding conjunctions in Greek and Latin.')

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Note here the careful connection with the older, safer subjects, as in (2) the Latin subject set for English essay for matriculation honours.

Tu regere imperio populos, Romane.

In considering this subject dwell upon the *causes* of the rapid extension of the power of Rome during the Republican period.

(3) In 1840 note a slightly Lit question. The 'following sentences to be corrected' are taken from Shakespeare, Addison, Warburton, Swift, etc. The examiner obviously is still especially glad to catch out Byron, quoting:

And dashest him again to earth – there let him lay  
for criticism.

(4) In 1843, the M.A. Classics examination has an English Essay Subject-theme: Is the Standard of Taste Arbitrary?

(5) 1859 is the great year when English Language and Literature become part of the B.A. course, Pass and Honours. Instantly, English Matric. has its first truly literary question : <sup>1</sup>

Define 'metre' and state how your definition applies to *Piers Plowman*, to *Paradise Lost*, and to Homer's *Iliad*.

Now we are started. In this great year, set books are in the syllabus (Bacon's *Essays* and *Lear* for Pass; more Shakespeare, *Lycidas*, *Absalom and Achitophel*, *Areopagitica*, *Advancement of Learning* and Clarendon's

<sup>1</sup> The year before this question was set, Bain had been an examiner. One could trace further links with Scotland.

LIT. ANG.

*History of the Great Rebellion* for the Honours. In the examination papers, the strange Lit. Ang. questions arise:

Give as many thoughts as you can from writers who flourished in the century ending with 1688 – the thoughts to be remarkable for beauty, force, or shrewdness . . .

Here already is the tone of the earlier Lit. And if this question did not seem to him mature enough, the young candidate could deal with ‘the qualities in Shakespeare which seemed to him, from a comparison of “Hamlet,” “Macbeth,” and “King John,” most remarkable.’

In time, the background of edification becomes less apparent: but the later characteristics of category by date, the demand for knowledge of ‘characteristics,’ the cool supposition that unbearded boys can reasonably be asked to pass judgment on the souls of mature Shakespeares, stands out more and more strongly.

And then, much later on, 1917, say, come those English matric. papers that I studied myself, long ago, buying back numbers to try and work out, by graph, whether it would be the turn next year, my year, for the ‘characters of Dickens’ or the ‘characters of Thackeray’ to be asked. I will copy them again:

Name the work in which any *six* of the following characters appear: Sir Bedevere, Orgoglio, Mr. Micawber, Amy Robsart, Dr. Primrose, etc.

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I am sure I remember this one:

Write notes on any *four* of the following poems: Samson Agonistes, In Memoriam, The Seasons, Adonais, The Happy Warrior, The Giaour. . . .

At 'the Giaour,' I remember, I paused. The name pleased me. I would look it up, I would try to speak it. Pure waste of time, it is true, because it was impossible they would ask the very same title in the next examination, which was to be mine. I did find out, and I did discover the pronunciation, from my literary aunt: but from that moment to this, it has never seemed to me possible to read the poem.

From about '88 onwards, the always comparatively well-supported School became one of the most popular. There are long dark columns, in the honours lists, of English students. London took easily to English, like Scotland, if for entirely different reasons. In Scotland, as has been shown, it was easier to accept the foreign English as the substitute for Latin as the language of culture – it was natural to do so. But with all its merits, its germs of future greatness, the idea of liberal culture had not been the compulsion behind the founding of the London university. It came out of Utilitarianism, out of practicality and common sense. It aimed at providing useful, vocational education. This, curiously enough, is how Our Subject came in: for English Language and Literature can easily be made to seem the least non-vocational of all the liberal schools. English is obviously useful: understanding it and

writing it is useful, in a much more direct way than are The Classics. English Literature, or at any rate Lit. Ang., might be said to be the typical 'Arts' subject of Utilitarianism. The Birkbeck foundation was conscious of no process of dichotomy when it changed its name, in the middle of the century, to *Literary* and Scientific Institute.

Thus has it been that in its beginnings London, wanting both the necessary organisation and the necessary type of tutor for individual teaching, and actuated by Utilitarian principles, made its first contribution to the New Subject in these early days a codification, an examinification, a disciplining, a chastening.

### *The Provinces*

If this is true of London, it is more true of the provincial Universities,<sup>1</sup> which during the nineteenth

<sup>1</sup> Ireland should come under this head, one would think, even more misleadingly than would Scotland. But so far as English Literature is concerned, though there were beginnings in Ireland almost as early as in Scotland (Chairs of English History and Literature being incorporated in the three new Colleges founded in 1845), and though in these joint chairs (copied from England) Literature was particularly favoured, yet the Irish character seems to have made little mark on education. The holder of the first Literary chair at Trinity College, Dublin, was Edward Dowden, capable of very effectively circumscribing or plugging native streams. Indeed, it was this antagonism for which in Dublin he was best known. A literary Irishman holding an official literary post when the Irish literary revival was at its height, he yet went out of his way to advise Aubrey de Vere never to make use of Irish lit models, scorned Ferguson and O'Grady, declined to participate in the celebration of Thomas Moore's centenary and, later, unswervingly preferred Whitman, and even Longfellow, to Yeats. He refused to have anything to do, either, with the Irish Literary Theatre.

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century exaggerated this tendency to reduce literature to its verifiable constituents. Durham, Manchester, Leeds, they came, and though each University has since developed a strong character of its own, with famous individual merits, it is natural that at first they should have started as mere reflections of London, inheriting London's habit of mechanisation even in this Literary School, which, in imitation, they too incorporated from the first.

Walter Raleigh, who had been a student at London himself, was able to trace through his wanderings the whole course of this London influence. His first lecturing was to Indian students in India, where, as he says, 'the University of London found a congenial soil for multiplying all its worst vices.' The Indian Lit text-books are a perfect burlesque of Lit. Ang., with superb notes. As an apposite digression let it be said here that most Literature lecturers rather dread the Indian student in London, when he follows their subject. He parodies the typical keen Lit student, instantly pulling up the lecturer if he gets a date wrong, endangering the spontaneity of his more brilliant *aperçus* by transcribing them *verbatim*, pencil grasped excitedly in delicate, marmoset fingers, and generally making the lecturer feel like a cynical racketeer by hanging back after the rest of the class has gone to try and ingratiate himself by stories of how he paid visits to Dr. Johnson's house, or de Quincey's Soho area, or how he bought a book 'dated 1765,' etc. Raleigh knew them, and he knew Lit. Ang. in the provinces as well. I am not suggest-

ing that he was any better pleased with the students he met at Oxford. He was less polite about these than any. At Manchester, he succeeded A. W. Ward. He may have been unlucky in his predecessor. Ward could serve up the most quivering fact, the richest literary excitements, in a way which made them as uninteresting and as easily arrangeable as the small slices of dry bread placed on the unaired napkins of the dinner tables of Marine Parade Hotels. He left for Raleigh a mass of notes, which Raleigh was grateful for, but found himself completely unable to use. And when Raleigh tried to suggest to his class that literature was connected, by unseverable nerves and arteries, with people, motives, life, he found himself treated, by the Ward-trained litters, to the coldly curious glance reserved for the foreigner:

I made some remarks on poetry in general (he records), which cost me more than fifteen matter-of-fact lectures, and they laid down their pens and smiled from an infinite height. So I must just boil down text-books in the recognised fashion.

No doubt Raleigh did nothing of the kind. No doubt by force of his personality he began, with A. C. Bradley, changes which have transformed the Provincial teaching of literature, which have made these universities centres of experiment. After all, he was speaking of very early days. There were still, while Raleigh was at Manchester, two enormous and very obvious absentees from the Lit. Ang. world; the two

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biggest guns were still silent, still disdainful. And until they relented, until Oxford and Cambridge, Oxford especially, saluted the New Subject, the various movements in its early history seemed preparatory only.

How this gap was filled: how Oxford's instinctive hatred of any branch of education which is directly useful, superficially easy, or attractive, which above all has connections with universities younger than itself—how this prejudice was at last overcome makes an interesting story.

## THE FALL OF OXFORD

### *Oxford in 1850*

To understand the history of the Fall of Oxford, the prolongation of the ardours of its long siege by the forces of Lit, the lateness of the date of its capitulation, the grudging and half-hogging nature of this capitulation, when it came, at a time when everywhere else there had been official or unofficial recognition of the great new subject: to understand, also, how it was that within twenty-five years of its inception Oxford became the undisputed Home of Lit. Ang., of the academic study of English Literature, with its new School the second most popular in the University – to comprehend the mystery of this change it is necessary to understand that the Oxford of 1850 was not the Oxford of 1920. That there have been metamorphoses so rapid, that judged by the tempo of Oxford they may almost be said to have been explosions.

In 1850, Oxford and Cambridge differed as fundamentally from the Scotch Universities their juniors as they did from the Continental Universities their seniors. The college had no place on the Continent. The student regarded himself as a member of his University, and would as soon think of loyalty to his bedroom as to his college. Students went to separate

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lectures for the separate subjects, given by Professors who were specialists exclusively in that subject: they were examined by University examiners. And the prestige of these professors depended on no personal or disciplinary relationship with the undergraduates, but on the fact that they professed their subjects, researched in them, and encouraged their students to research also. The continental Universities – and the Scottish ones followed their example – were in fact centres of learning, rather than of teaching; centres of discovery, and of progress in knowledge.

At Oxford, aims, organisation – everything was different. The Professors existed, but less than half of them delivered lectures, many of them did not reside, and even if they did, they were mostly as innocent of performance as Thomas Gray, Cambridge ‘Professor’ of Modern History in the 1780’s. What lectures there were must often have been delivered to the tiniest of audiences. Undergraduates were not encouraged to attend. They were seen through their courses – taught, examined, and generally mothered – by the tutors of their own college. This would seem at first sight to be rather like the ‘regenting’ of seventeenth-century Scotland, like the training of students in all branches by their one overseer, by tutors of encyclopædic knowledge. Far from it. The Oxford tutors knew nothing but the classics, the Cambridge, nothing but classics and mathematics. As a result, their students were forcibly confined to these subjects, whatever other kind of studies might have appeared on the Oxford syllabuses.

That there are certain advantages in this highly personal relationship between teacher and taught is well known. The evils connected with such things as 'external examinations' are avoided, for instance. It may even be said that the best kind of tutor system – if for instance a Jowett be the tutor – is better than the best kind of Professoring. More obvious are the dangers of a University run by that closed circle which the tutors, if all-powerful, turn themselves into – run by men who elected their own like to succeed them and had done so for three hundred years. A proved rule of the world of pedagogics is that prolonged co-option leads to pedantry, circumscription, deterioration. This is what had happened. The humanism of the renaissance had gradually narrowed to the study of the classics, and had dwindled again to the study of certain set books which could not ever be said by any rational standard to be the best. The range was always narrowing until the great ones, the greatest philosophers and dramatists, were neglected in favour of the texts most suitable for construing, for detailed treatment. It can easily be seen that this was not University education at all, but super sixth-form teaching, run by super form-masters, with no discovery, no addition to learning, about it. The metaphor for the aims and results of such a plan may almost be fairly expressed by that very dangerous phrase, when applied to any stage in teaching, 'wit-sharpening.'<sup>1</sup> And some of those wit-sharpened students, those who were most adept at

<sup>1</sup> 'Worst of metaphors,' says Whitehead.

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the imitation of classical Greek prose, became in their turn sharp-witted tutors, who formed shrewd and intimate little councils, to keep the works going, to keep things as they always had been. At Oxford, they called themselves the Oxford Hebdomadal Council: at Cambridge, the Cambridge Caput. Past the Oxford Hebdomadal Council and the Cambridge Caput any innovation had to squeeze its way, and for that acrobatic squeeze no amount of pushing was sufficient, as any student of the habits of oligarchies, especially clerical oligarchies, will know.

### *Oxford attacks Oxford*

The acquiescence of Oxford to outside suggestion has never been proverbial, though the effects gained by the first move in its reform would seem to contradict this. In 1850 Royal Commissions of Enquiry were appointed to advise improvements for Oxford and Cambridge. Within eight years, their recommendations had been made, and legislation had been set in motion to put them into effect. These changes were pushed further by a second Commission, of 1877. It sounded, from outside, like a reform forced on Oxford by the Government, one of the successive reforms of ancient institutions which succeeded each other through the nineteenth century. But, in fact, Oxford was reforming herself, was impatient with herself. Young men like the Apostles (Tennyson . . . Hallam . . . Maurice, etc., in the 'thirties) started those complaints which later great liberals – Arnold at Oxford and Mark Pattison at

Cambridge – made into explicit attacks. Oxford and Cambridge, as Arnold was to write, were ‘*hauts lycées*’; and though invaluable in their way as places where the youth of the upper class prolong to a very great age, and under some very admirable influences, their school education . . . yet they are still, in fact, *Schools*.’ Oxford’s complete failure to tally with national changes, her burnt-out torch – above all, the autocratic manners of her self-appointed rulers, led to rebellion within the university itself. The doctoring Royal Commission came at the urgent call of the patient. Save us from our rulers. An Oxford sulkily indignant at charges of out-of-dateness, and worse, aimed by the *Edinburgh Review*<sup>1</sup> in the eighteen-thirties, had changed by mid-century to an Oxford in reluctant or even sympathetic agreement.

### *Attack from Albert*

The connection between the breaking of the authority of the tutors and the founding in Oxford of a School of English Language and Literature may seem distant. Nevertheless, the attack on the Tutors was the necessary first step. The Commissioners advised, and their proposals eventually brought

<sup>1</sup> In 1809: The English clergy, in whose hands education entirely rests, bring up the first young men of the country as if they were all to keep grammar schools in little country towns . . . they fancy that mental exertion must end in religious scepticism . . . an infinite quantity of talent is annually destroyed. . . .

In 1831: The present academical system of Oxford is illegal . . . it was surreptitiously intruded into the University by the heads of the collegiate interest, for private ends.

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about, an extension of Schools. Besides the selected classical texts of the Tutors, new subjects were to be studied. Or more accurately, the Professors already attached for these subjects were to lecture when they were supposed to lecture, undergraduates were to attend, examinations were to be set in the new subjects; and the Professors were to be reasonably paid.

The first new Schools to get under way seemed very far removed from English Literature, though on the whole New Subjects meant Modern Subjects, and Modern Languages was specifically instituted on the advice of the Commissioners. Of the possible degree subjects, the Commissioners especially demanded that 'mental philosophy and philology should be one' and that 'philology should not be restricted to Greek and Latin; Sanscrit and Modern languages should have a place.' The School of Modern Languages itself was not so unprecedentedly new as to be unbearably painful: the teaching of French, German, Italian and Spanish already existed. But (at the Taylorian Institute) the tradition was that they were subsidiary, unworthy subjects, adjuncts only, adjuncts of history, for example. The only possible way to treat them, it was admitted, was philologically. When the Philological Chair was founded, in 1868, the Modern Languages Chair was abolished. There was nothing, obviously, in 'modern languages' which could not be catered for in the most suitable possible way by philology. And for the new modern languages, there was no kind of sign at the start (as there was at Cambridge when

their Modern Languages Chair was founded in 1884) of the vast popularity which was to come. Other, non-literary new Chairs were much more successful – had better incumbents, perhaps; Art, for instance, having its Professor Ruskin.

Yet it is strange that English Literature should not have been suggested. Amateur interest in the subject had long been even stronger in Oxford than in London. In the seventeenth century there had been the amateur vogue for Saxon. Laud had vaguely encouraged Anglo-Saxon learning, and perhaps out of this, genuine antiquarian discoverers of Oxford and Cambridge concentrated on this excitingly unknown mine, and began explorations which have so very long since lost their pioneering freshness. Archbishop Parker had had Anglo-Saxon types cut at Cambridge in 1566, and started a collection of manuscripts there: Laud had given the Bodleian the Peterborough version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. By the end of the seventeenth century type had been cut at Oxford as well, Hickes had written the first Anglo-Saxon grammar, a Saxon lectureship led to a Chair (1795) and at Queen's there was a 'nest of Saxonists.' In the reign of Queen Anne there were still enthusiasts. And there was just as keen an interest in more recent literature. In the seventeenthies Gerard Langbaine and Anthony à Wood might possibly have been discussing together at Headington the order of merit of the English authors. In the next century, the London coffee-house discussion of the pros and cons of literary matters had its

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parallel at Oxford. In Firth's words: 'Cirques Jobson, the Jew from near Mount Libanus, little knew when he began to sell coffee "in a house between Edmund Hall and Queen's College Corner" that he was not merely vending "a grave and wholesome liquor," but initiating a movement which would change the curriculum of the University.' <sup>1</sup> More, Oxford had its Chair of Poetry (founded in 1708) which, even if the lectures to begin with were delivered in Latin and only mentioned English poetry by way of an illustrative aside, had had fairly distinguished holders, had had at any rate famous English Literature men like Thomas Warton; dignified, large, religious figures like Milman; more than respectable scholars like Copleston, and Conybeare.

But amateur enthusiasm and curio professorships are one thing, official recognition quite another. Statutory innovation at Oxford has often been met with polite and genial resistance, of the kind capable of taking the edge off the keenest, the most urgent reformations. Sanely, temperately, the authorities 'see the good in the reforms,' think there is much to be said for them, and then (fatherly, humorous) kill the spirit, the Principle, which has given them life. Many of the reformations fell through, often because of small but important little compromises. Prize fellowships, for instance, were still held for life, withholding money which (since no obligation to teach was attached to these fellowships) was needed for the new Chairs.

<sup>1</sup> D. Nichol Smith, *Lectures on English Studies*. C. H. Firth.

In fact, there were signs that even that same progressive Oxford which fought for the Commission before it came, tried to disown its recommendations. The trend of the reform was not popular, and for one cogent reason. It was felt that the Commission was too literally Royal. It was believed that the power in the background was the Prince of their land, was the sincere but unwelcome Albert, painstakingly including the Universities in his plans for improving England. This influence it was easy for them to exaggerate, and natural for them to oppose. Re-read, in Macaulay, the heroic story of the opposition of Oxford to the 'reforms' of King James, and understand the brave tradition. Here (thus they must have begun to work upon themselves) was 1687 come again – the ghosts of the brave Fellows of Magdalen were warning them. Professor Freeman spoke out: 'We do not want,' he said, 'we do not want an irresponsible band of oligarchs sent down by the minister or prince of the day to carry out whatever additional Germanisms may be most acceptable to a bureau of public instruction.'

It was as impossible to deny German influence in the proposals for more Schools as in the suggestion that, Heidelberg-wise, Professors should deliver lectures and students should attend them. Hence grew that resistance to the new subject, and hence a new solidarity in Oxford, standers-up for rights finding themselves fighting shoulder to shoulder with mere preservers of the status quo, united against the Teutonic menace. New subjects, modern subjects, came

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to be regarded, in the words which broke from Freeman when he was incredulously contemplating the proposed foundation of a School of History-Up-To-1789, as 'a bauble.' And needless to say the undergraduates, as always, were the most conservative of all, regarding the New as cranky, not attending the lectures, sharing in the snobbish distaste for subjects popular at the new Cockney Universities. They made fun – as they made fun at Cambridge – of the introduction of the study of natural and moral science:

Think aught of musty classic Saws, old as the reign of  
Saturn?

No! thanks to our new Triposes, the things to study now  
are

Your *Natural*-rot, your *Moral*-bosh – the German School's  
in power –

Go, Pollmen! nay, ye needs must go; for so the heads  
determine

(Like Gower-street's curst Academy and such-like stink-  
ing vermin.)<sup>1</sup>

Against all this opposition, English literature seemed to stand the least chance of all. The subject was almost fantastically modern; worse, it was a kind of offshoot of Modern Languages, a subject under the gravest suspicion because of its undoubted practical value. There had been suggestions, for instance, indignantly received, that the School might be of use to candidates for the diplomatic service. But if Modern Languages was a 'courier's tripos,' as

<sup>1</sup> See *In Cap and Gown: three centuries of Cambridge Wit*. Edited, with an introduction, by C. Whibley.

it was to be nicknamed, then surely English Language and Literature were the school of the intelligent postman, or the village schoolmistress. And if it was pleaded that the Chair of Poetry, with its respectable age, bestowed the necessary dignity of tradition, there would be as many to say that no, it did not: that on the contrary the only tradition connected with the Chair was one of feebleness. That its first holders were Nobodies even to their academic contemporaries, that there was a contemporary record that Trapp,<sup>1</sup> for instance, was an 'empty vain pretender,' that his first lecture was 'a very silly indiscreet performance,' that 'what was good was taken out of Julius Scaliger,' that 'half his speech was nothing but verses out of Vergil,' and that he 'once or twice spoke in an obscene manner not fit to be used before young men.' And it was said, moreover, that Trapp's successors, Whitfield, Hawkins, Wheeler, Randolph, were equally Nobodies. That Thomas Warton the elder had no learning, and it was impossible to hear what he said. And that of the two others who might have been perfectly illuminating on the subject of Poetry, of English Poetry, Thomas Warton the younger gave lectures in Latin on classical prose, and the learned Spence, 'profiting,' to quote Saintsbury, 'by the almost Elysian tolerance of his sensible century, and finding that neither residence nor lecturing was insisted on, seems to have resided very little, and to have lectured hardly or not at all.'

<sup>1</sup> First Professor, 1708-18.

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English seemed impossible. Literature, hopelessly out of it. To mix up the kind of subject which was enthusiastically argued round undergraduate study fires with subjects suitable to be set for examinations, to make Work-matter out of a fascinating spare-time hobby, was against academic nature. Yet something like English Literature, they knew, was needed. At any rate something like a new literary study was needed. A new Modern Subject which was of a less blatantly practical value than the learning of French idioms. A new humanist study, to balance the new scientific, or practical schools.

Classics would seem to be the natural humanist alternative to Science. But in fact the teaching of classics had decayed. Before the liberating world expressed by the classical writers could be apprehended, the languages had to be learned; and because language-learning could be reduced to a routine, and the learning of a culture was a self-enlargement and a separate action for which no universal routine could be devised, language, the means, became lazily, mechanically, the end. The first humanists knew the danger:

Grammar being but an introduction to the understanding of authors, if it be made too long or exquisite to the learner, it in a manner mortifieth his courage.

Milton's words – but into this dangerous rut classical education at Oxford had fallen. Texts were chosen, not by the test of how rich a world they

revealed, but by the test of how pretty were the problems of their translation.

It must have occurred to many, even at this time, that with English Literature a fresh start could be made – English, with no linguistic irrelevancies, yet with worlds just as fertile as the classical to bestow. For the purpose of the restoration of true humanism, a true ‘Lit. Hum.,’ it was the perfect choice. Would not Oxford support it for this reason?

‘Humanism’ is not now a precise word. Oxford, obviously, is connected with certain senses, certain over-meanings of that word. When it means vaguely liberal, or non-utilitarian, or something to do with dignified scholarship, or something to do with the classics – Oxford is obviously connected with these things. But to true Humanism, to the word which stands for nurture of true personality, of the kind of knowledge which has nothing to do with information, it seems sometimes that Oxford is opposed. The study of English Literature had to come, but before it could be accepted by Oxford, it seems as if it had to be turned into the study of something else.

*Back-stairs Entry by Skeat*

Before Oxford could be persuaded to regard it seriously, English Literature had to change its outward garments; something would have to be worn which on the outside at any rate looked more like the classical disciplining which had been ‘education’ at Oxford for so long.

The reader will guess the solution which I am

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hinting at. The one way in which a text-trained Oxford might be got to think seriously about official acceptance of English Literature was the way of Philology, of Old English; it would obviously ease matters if English could be made to look like a dead language.

There had already been the tradition at Queen's, the setters of Saxon type and the group of language enthusiasts of the sixteen-nineties. This particular movement was dead. For a hundred years at any rate it was quiescent, and then it rather remarkably revived, this time more as a vogue, borne along no doubt on the antiquarian slope of the back-to-the-past wave of the Romantick revival. In 1795, a 'Rawlinsonian Chair' of Anglo-Saxon was founded at Oxford, at the same time that a history of the Anglo-Saxons was being written (by Sharon Turner) which was to stir up much Saxon study generally. The reading man began to be conscious that there were '(a) Saxon and (b) Romance' words in his speech: there was some popular interest in philology: Horne Tooke's *Diversions of Purley*, a work catering for such a taste, had a very fair sale. And then, when this vogue interest seemed likely to reach its natural limit and fade away, the embers of the dying subject were blown into a roaring flame ten times as hot as ever by the great language discovery of the nineteenth century, Comparative Philology. Words suddenly became linked with nationality, history, mythology, as they never had been before. Comparative Philology joined language to science

and presented it with a verifiable theory which happened to work in beautifully with the ideology most attractive to an age of incipient evolution concepts. Words suddenly became as important and exciting as fossils, or intermaxillary bones.

True the discovery was not particularly English. Whether Grimm or Bopp should carry the credit for 'Grimm's Law,' it is certain that their English philological contemporaries, even as late as the eighteenth-thirties, were innocent of all these events. But soon disciples spread the doctrine, Rosen at University College, London, as early as 1828, and ten years later J. M. Kemble at Cambridge felt justified in attacking Oxford for its antiquated, pre-comparative-philology ways.

London University was the real pioneer in this new subject, but the influence of Cambridge was in those days so much greater, that we must go there to watch developments. This new philology turned English Literature into a new hunting ground for the scientific Antiquarian and Detail man. For him, the whole parade of English writers became suddenly connected with the real thing. The language of the earliest of them was a fascinatingly interesting cognate with Old High German and the Scandinavian speeches. Regarded historically, the dullest or the obscenest writers might be philologically the most subtle: English Literature, so far as the complexity of its language was concerned, was found to compare favourably with Greek. A new type of Lit man arose.

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Such a man was Walter Skeat. O name of Skeat, W. W. Skeat, so familiar to ears of students in the phrase 'Skeat's edition of.' A life of Skeat might reveal the heart of Lit quicker than any general directory. He was born in the mid-thirties in the air of a London most pregnant not only with the new author-worship but with the new philology. But though he was at the same King's College School of his fellow-Lit-tribune Saintsbury, his headmaster was not the literary Dr. Mayor but the philological Oswald Cockayne, pioneer teacher of Anglo-Saxon. The direction of Skeat's interest was fixed early. He came into contact with the English classics, but only, like most of his contemporaries, by having to translate scraps of them into Latin. On the impulse of the new literary movement of which Saintsbury was a part he read, on his own initiative, some of these authors in bulk. Thus he discovered Spenser. Thus, too, he discovered Shakespeare. But even with Shakespeare it would seem, from his account of it, that the language-analysing habit already predominated. 'It was in the year of the great Exhibition of 1851' (Skeat records his memory of himself at 16) 'that I obtained as a prize a copy of Steevens and Malone's *Shakespeare*; and this edition was, at any rate, good enough for purposes of common use. The glossary, of course, had no references, but it was an amusement to supply them for myself.' Already, authors begin to seem editable.

Skeat's official career was to have been the Church, but he was borne back by the stream of destiny to

Cambridge, and philology. There were to be found Morris, Furnivall and others founding the Early English Text Society. The excitement of Gold Rush days again, as the extent of the unpublished, or only hitherto sketchily published material was realised. There will never be again so much unfingered English Literature. It was not so much the Anglo-Saxon classics which made the mouth water; the most thickly filled veins lay in the transition period between this earlier writing and modern English. 'Middle English' it was called: and this phrase *Middle English* in itself held excitement, with its atmosphere of being above such irrelevancies as authors, with its scientific coolness, with its evolutionary emphasis. Now that the last drops of juice had been masticated out of Notes on Tacitus, now that Virgil had been pecked away to a skeleton, the bolder scholar could turn this way with new and copiously salivating relish.

Skeat became permanently dedicated to this work partly through a lucky accident at the start of his career. The E.E.T.S. gave him the work of re-editing *Launcelot of the Laik*. Quite soon he found that there were serious errors in the hitherto revered Maitland Club Edition with which he was working. He was 'surprised to discover,' he found himself 'bound to record,' he had no alternative but to find fault 'with such eminent scholars as,' etc. It was a major discovery. There was a nine days' wonder. Skeat, the unknown local doctor, had the luck to diagnose appendicitis in the Princess's baby. His

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reputation was made, his career fixed. He was editor for life.

We have already remarked on this Editing sub-division of Lit, and on the special quality which the scholar imparts to the book on which he is working. Those who have ever done a little editing themselves will not be surprised at the pervasiveness of this quality. The work of editing is vast but easy. It is perfect employment for those who wish to loose themselves in a passion of activity, excluding all worries. One becomes a Work Hero: the big hand scythes away hour after hour so easily from the clock. Then, at the end, there is the invigorating contrast of your new neater completer result and the old book you have been working on, its errors corrected, its outmoded binding substituted by a modern one. No wonder the editor has a little superfluous personality, a little self-expression to get rid of, virility to spare. Firmly he grasps his author between forefinger of his Introduction and thumb of his Appendix. With cheerful respect, he embraces him with notes, and then, final hearty pat on the back, a good big index. There is no such thing as a self-effacing editor, unless it be a man like Walter Scott, for whom editing is a by-path, a side activity to more creative work.

Not that I would wish to be associated with the common Lit habit of holding up the ideal of self-effacement as essential to good editing. This is the usual 'stand aside for genius' attitude.<sup>1</sup> The editor

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 25*ff.* for editors and the Litting of Shakespeare.

has his own genius to express, or he would not be at work at all. Where he feels admiration, disagreement, etc., experience shows that it is better for him to utter it. Complete detachment from his author compels him to burst out unexpectedly somewhere else. That is why in the introductions and notes of those editors most ascetically silent about the author they are editing the reader will be most likely to find himself unexpectedly in the midst of some irrelevant argument, will find himself suddenly ducking beneath the blows of some controversy which he is expected to referee, button-holed by one side and told that it is 'regrettable that so eminent a scholar as Dr. Wegg,' and then in somebody else's edition pulled by his coat-tails into the other corner and asked whether it is possible that 'with all the manuscripts in the Bodleian at his disposal,' Dr. Megg should have omitted to do something else. This, indeed, is detached editing – all too detached, the reader will think, from the Work which is being presented, or the precious impulses of its author. It is a simple fact, that the contrast between the kind of man who writes a living work and the kind of man who edits it is more than the mere opposition of contraries. The irritations of college common-room arguments, the jocularities of keen old antiquarians excavating a corner of Blackpatch Down, the geniality of the talk at the cress tea afterwards – the smell and savour of this atmosphere is so much more potent than that whisper from a different world, the Book. Skeat I pick on, not because he was the first

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editor of English texts – I have already said something of the ancient history of this – but because he was the first great Senior Common-Room editor, the first of a long line which became all-powerful in Lit.

This cheerful atmosphere of the geologist's field day, with speeches after tea, is the quality Skeat imparts. I have only to quote a few phrases from his introductions for the initiate reader to be transported instantly to this world.

It was fortunate that the peculiarly difficult task of editing the *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England* fell into such able hands as those of the Rev. Oswald Cockayne.

The generous help afforded me on this occasion is a thing to be remembered.

My indefatigable assistant in this labour, Miss Jackson, became a sad invalid in her later years . . . but she bore her trials with much courage and even cheerfulness, and at all times took much interest in English dialects and etymology.

At first Skeat dressed only mediæval romances and dark monkish utterances in these strange clothes. But later he took to more recent literature, pushing on to Late Middle and Early Modern, making his name by his famous and admirable editions of Langland and Chaucer.

Nor was he by any means only concerned with this older English. He is pointed at by philologists as an example of broad-mindedness in this respect.

Officially, he could only be connected with Anglo-Saxon, of which he was made Cambridge professor.<sup>1</sup> But he was conscious of a certain lack of appeal, of a lack of enthusiasm from the undergraduates. At first he thought it possible that no one would listen to his lectures at all, that no one would come. 'Curiously enough,' he wrote – a favourite phrase – 'this has never actually happened; in every year there have been some two or three who, for some reason or other, have wanted instruction.' He was the first to realise that more modern English Literature might have a greater following. He was in favour of general literature reading, not necessarily too systematic, for younger students. Selections might be made for them. Reading complete works was not always practicable. Only a very few poets, he said, 'like Keats and Campbell and Milton and Longfellow, wrote nothing that one would like to miss.'

He began to put his thoughts into effect.

Cambridge had less predisposition to English Literature – or to Rhetoric its forerunner – than Oxford. Its concentration on mathematics was greater than Oxford's on classics. It was high time, Skeat said, that undergraduates should know more about our own authors than to turn such and such a passage of Shakespeare into Greek Iambics. Mark Pattison would agree, with the reservation (implied in his famous dictum that the appreciation of *Paradise Lost* was the last reward of scholarship) that knowledge of the classics should come first. J. W.

<sup>1</sup> 1878–1912.

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Hales, on the other hand, went much further than Skeat, talking of the deep-rooted 'prejudice' in favour of Latin, handed down from the Dark Ages. 'Future historians will read with curiosity,' he said, 'that now were English boys and girls introduced for the first time to the great classics of their own country. In France, is not French taught? In Germany, German?' Skeat gave a hardly spared £100 to found a prize for English Literature at Christ's College, with a written examination. The questions are a foreshadowing of the future. Of course they are mainly philological; even papers on the Shakespeare plays are chiefly a test of the students' knowledge of the glossary: but there are other questions, true Lit. Ang. The very young man, his pupil, is faced with vast problems, demanding Nestorian replies:

What use is made of this concept in the criticism on *Hamlet* in *Wilhelm Meister*? To what extent is Goethe's theory of the play modified by Coleridge's? Give your own view of Hamlet's character as conceived by Shakespeare.

Afterwards, with the founding of the Mediæval and Modern Languages Tripos in '86, Skeat agitated for a University Lectureship in English. He wrote to *The Times* to appeal for funds. He received 'precisely one answer.' Later, the small money was found. But this was in 1896, and by then certain cataclysmic upheavals elsewhere had changed the face of nature.

Oxford had taken to the new philology. After

many hesitations she had been surprisingly made to accept its doctrines by the enthusiasm of a foreigner from the most suspect of countries. The personality of Max Muller<sup>1</sup> conquered. And very soon Oxford seemed to be making the new subject her own, to be carrying philological thoroughness even beyond the Teutonic pitch with the magnificent new dictionary which was soon to be, naturally and justly, the pride of the University.

Now was the time.

All this may seem far from *Literis Anglicis*. But a moment's thought will show how propitious the occasion, for the introduction of the new School.

The new philology made the occasion. The most regrettable element in a New Subject, in the eyes of dubiously questioning Authority, is its newness. Philology supplied dignity, and even venerability.

Supplied it directly, by emphasising the great age of our language. Less directly, the new comparative philology, presenting languages as elements in the evolution of speech, made it clear that the ancient glories of a literature must be judged relatively to its own time scale. Modern and ephemeral-seeming as they were, Shakespeare, Milton, might possibly, by future generations, be counted as the ancient glory of England. Bewildering but undoubtedly impressive

<sup>1</sup> Appointed Professor of the Taylorian Institute of Modern Languages (dating from 1835) in 1854. He lectured on 'Origin of Romance Languages' . . . 'Principles of Etymology.' Muller brought about the first exoteric enthusiasm for Philology. His classes dwindled in the end largely because, he used to complain, his pupils were now successful teachers themselves.

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were the hints from abroad, especially from Germany, of the reverend respect in which English authors were held there, including writers later than Shakespeare: including Goldsmith and Sterne. There were elaborate studies, by scholars, of English writers . . . Shakespeare societies.

More directly, again, the new editing of English works was showing a way round the prime objection of the Hebdomadal Council, always at the back of their protective clerical minds when the question of English Literature came up – its unsuitability for the young. Recollect how, a hundred years before, Blair had always found it necessary to warn against the immorality of Shakespeare. The fearful example of Byron could never be quite forgotten. Byron, in the words of the first Lit text-book, ‘doomed to be exiled from the libraries of all virtuous men.’ Would one wish to revive any kind of connection with such danger? It was different with the immoralities of the pagan writers. They lived before Christ and could know no better. I have already noted F. D. Maurice’s difficulties with his First Set Book choice, *King John* – difficulties with certain parts of Act I. I also described Maurice’s way out – substitution of the innocuous *Prologue*. Blair lived before the days of Bowdler. The principle of Bowdler, and the exercise of it by the editors of the English classics, by the refiners, who have tried to keep it from the world that the Jews in Chaucer’s *Prioress’s Tale* were so immodest as to throw the corpse of the Christian boy into a lavatory, or that Pertelote in the Nonne’s

Prestes Tale made the soulless suggestion that the dreams of her husband Chaunticleer were due to the fact that he was constipated: the Shakespeare cuts which have prevented more than four lines of the porter's vulgar speech in *Macbeth* from entering the household, although the dramatic point of it is that it is vulgar, or which have seen to it that the best of Edmond's sardonic mutterings in *Lear* ('I should have bin that I am, had the maidenlest Starre in the Firmament twinkled on my bastarddizing') is to this very day cut out of all school editions of the play except one – all these trimming and reforming activities, started by the editors, removed the prime objection to the new subject.

Above all, perhaps – to get back to the language men – there was one obvious want which the historical study of the English Language supplied – spade work. The good hard plumbing kind of work which in the eyes of educational authority is the salt of study. Evolution for evolution, the language problems of English seemed actually more complex than those of Greek. Middle Greek, Middle Latin, were much less of a separate language to be learnt than the newly discovered Middle English. At Cambridge, even as early as the 'seventies, it was pointed out in support of the new subject that 'any one who opens Mr. Morris's *Specimens of Early English* may soon encounter difficulties in abundance, difficulties not only of a verbal kind.'

The study of English Literature, especially now that the possibilities of turning it into the study of

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something else were apparent, soon began to seem imminent. Oxford seemed on the verge of capitulation. All was ready.

But once more, there was a hitch. Once more, at the critical moment, pressure on Oxford *from without*; a fatal error in diplomacy. Alas – if the progressing tortoise of a University is pushed, if it receives the faintest encouraging tap of a kick forwards, it will stick fast, motionless, all shell. In this case not only was the tap a hard shove, but it came from the kind of quarter from which Oxford was least likely to accept dictation.

### *Attack from Churton Collins*

The general pressure was becoming very strong. In the nineteenth century a new nation had grown up, conscious as if for the first time of its literature. The reading public of the eighteen-fifties was ten times that of the seventeen-fifties – hence the exoteric quality of the great Victorian writers. A Dickens does not create, but is created by, his public. The idea that our literature was great and dignified began to permeate the nation. There was a reaction against the adulation of the classics at the expense of our own writers. At the same time, there was a popular impression that Oxford needed reforming, and one was given to understand that though English Literature was officially recognised in that it had been admitted (but not till 1873) to the Pass examination by the provision that one of the four groups of the B.A. examination should

include a 'period or subject of English Literature,' yet since there was no one to teach the subject or to encourage it the provision was face-saving only, of no practical value.

The public began to complain. So did the Commission, the Second Commission, of 1877, who made unrewarded efforts to leave the unwanted child on somebody else's doorstep. If it could not be connected with a specially created School of Modern Literature, why not with Modern History? All agreed – except the Professor of History. Dr. Stubbs was firm. 'I think,' he said, 'that to have the history school hampered with dilettante teaching, such as the teaching of English Literature, must necessarily do great harm to the school.' Whereupon all (except the Professor of Anglo-Saxon) agreed that it could admirably be grafted on to the School of Philology. Theology was equally inhospitable. But with every fresh repulse, the public demand became more articulate. There was a campaign. Newspapers and reviews, especially those which went in for literary pages, took it up. A Society for the Extension of University Teaching was formed. It was pointed out, with greater and greater indignation, that Oxford was gradually becoming the only institution in which English Literature played no part. The subject of English came into the Civil Service exams, it was among the papers set for the Oxford and Cambridge Local. The Provincial Universities, London University, were already beginning to make a valuable and popular school of it. Above all, in the new

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Extension Lectures, so warmly approved of by the public, English Literature was more widely followed than Science or History.

Now this Extension Scheme (partly because of one of its Lecturers) becomes important in our history. English Literature had quickly become first choice in the Extension programmes. Without the handicap, or the support, of tradition; free from the necessity of working within the demands of an examination yet needing the substitute of general interest for the mechanical spur of degree hunting, Extension Lecturing from the first found the novelty and excitement of English invaluable. At Oxford or Cambridge, students are sometimes willing to listen attentively to surprisingly desiccated utterances on minute points of scholarship because they have the feeling that they are getting the best, that these irregular drops are distilled from the very essence of learning, that they are standing near the altar. But the Extension lecturer is handicapped by the word extension; and he must make up for the lack of prestige by an ability to lecture clearly and eloquently, to read aloud well, and to hold the students' attention by the merits of his subject and his method of handling it. English is the perfect aid for the lecturer who has to make the most of himself.

Of these 'outside' lecturers, much the best known was John Churton Collins. It is exceedingly difficult, even now, to pass final judgment on this extraordinary man. If he had his rights – and his history shows that this was the one thing he was incapable

of possessing – it would seem that any book like this on the growth and acceptance of English Teaching should be inscribed only to him. He was the best of the lecturers, had a real passion for his subject, wrote well himself, had first-hand knowledge of literatures, was so far from being a fanatic for the modern that he saw the study of English made effective only by combining it with the study of the classics, and he had absolute belief in the rightness of the revolution he championed. Moreover, and most important (if the main thesis of this book is correct), he was no mere Literary Person, but saw in English Literature the true *Literæ Humaniores*, the right education for Man. A veritable champion – yet it is doubtful whether, in the end, he did not do more harm than good to his cause.

The first thing to record in his life is this passion for literature. At Oxford (which he adored) he talked it all out with fellow-undergraduates H. H. Asquith, T. H. Warren, Rawsley. He was a great reciter, to them, of prose and poetry. He conceived a passionate admiration for writers, all writers, dead or living. For Swinburne, who was fascinated by his enthusiasm, and with whom there was a long friendship. He would manœuvre shamelessly for introductions to the contemporary great – if they were writers. To Carlyle. To Browning. He studied their tastes. Swinburne spoke words in casual praise of Tourneur: Collins sat down to edit Tourneur. In fact he was soon in a spate of editing, plunging into the still plentiful untouched material.

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There was a moment of triumph when his first Essay – on Dryden – was accepted by the *Quarterly*. Then, in 1880, he began the lecturing, working very hard, beginning in Brixton, working all over London, touring, lecturing in the States. And with the lectures went propaganda for his subject, an ‘almost missionary fervour’ it was said, arguing everywhere, arguing in articles, for the establishment of a School of Literature at the great Universities, for a School, especially, at his beloved Oxford.

As Collins and his theme began to be famous, it became more and more difficult for the authorities not to take action. It was at last agreed that a Chair should be endowed, having the title English Language and Literature. Not very willingly, the details were drawn up. Applications for the post were solicited, Collins seemed to be winning his point. The first step was to be taken.

Collins, of course, applied for the post. It is probably an exaggeration to say that it was taken for granted he would get it. But he had no doubts himself. Up till this time, he had usually got what he wanted. He had the happiest connections with his own University. But it is doubtful if the appointing committee even considered his name. Collins was an Oxford man, but that was the one small point in his favour. Any one who has ever breathed twenty breaths of Oxford air, who has felt himself, against his inclination, become placid-eyed and forgetful of ambition as he walked along Merton Street to turn into the Meadows, will know that Churton Collins

could never have been appointed to Oxford, that he was the perfect type of Bad Candidate for Oxford. First, he was a better lecturer than scholar, a judgment which could be based on the fact that he had taken a poor degree, and had edited *numerous* books covering a *wide* field, with notes (because most of them were for schools) not much documented. Secondly, he was a rusher-about from place to place, a lecturer in demand, delivering, at his worst, as many as five times a day, in five different parts of London. Thirdly, he was markedly non-recluse, with dubious outside interests besides literature. He considered himself a criminologist, making a dozen visits, with amateur detective friends, to the scene of the Whitechapel murders. He made connections with kinds of life which can rather justly be described as 'newsy.' He had been known, more than once, to make a railway journey on the footplate of an engine. It was even rumoured that he had once interested himself in spiritualism. But above all, it was the popular success of his lecturing, the fact that there was an uncritical demand for him, with the hint of prostitution, the impression of his loud and eloquent voice always lecturing.

Well, he would not be demanded by Oxford. They appointed Napier, a scholar familiar with certain interestingly abstruse problems of Anglo-Saxon accident, who had delivered lectures on subjects which very few people could understand in a voice nobody could hear. Collins was angrily disappointed. His purpose did not alter, but from now on

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his championship was militant, and the attack became for the first time personal.

The rest of the world was sympathetic. He was encouraged to say what he thought about it. The *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Edinburgh Review* gave him space. In the *Edinburgh* of October, 1886, Collins criticised the appointment. There was already, he began, a Chair of Anglo-Saxon, Celtic and Comparative Philology: yet

availing themselves of a quibble in the word 'language' – for the Statute authorising the foundation of the chair happened, by a mere accident, to couple the word 'language' with 'literature' – they succeeded in ignoring the object for which the chair was founded, and proceeded to elect, at a permanent salary of about £900, a Professor for the interpretation of Middle English. . . . It is half-painful, half-ludicrous to reflect that at the present moment, in Oxford alone, upwards of £3000 a year are expended on the interpretation of writings which are confessedly of no literary value, and are of interest only as monuments of language, while not one farthing a year is spent on the interpretation of works which are the glory of our country.

The text for these complaints, the book under review, was Edmund Gosse's *From Shakespeare to Pope, An Enquiry into the Causes*, etc. – the Clark lectures on English Literature at Cambridge. The official dressing of the book, the fact that it was Collins who (Collins felt) should have been giving these Clark lectures – it was all intensely irritating. In ten angry pages he pulls the book to pieces, flinging at its tendency to give 'irrefragable proofs of dates and facts

which no one will question, and which are to be found in so Common a book as Johnson's *Lives*: at its incorrectness of fact (we are certainly reminded that this was still only the early days of Lit knowledgeableness when Gosse says that Milton and Roscommon were the only poets who used blank verse between the years 1660 and 1760). Most of all is Collins rubbed the wrong way by Gosse's confident airs and graces, by charming little, light, Gossy, personal reflections, quotations, confessions, and the like:

Could the delegates of the Cambridge Press have been blind to the ludicrous impropriety of permitting what was intended to be a serious treatise on English Literature to be prefaced by a copy of silly verses, in which the author – an official of the university – assures the reader that he is

Less than bird or shell,  
More volatile, more fragile far than this. . . .

'It is shocking,' says Collins, 'it is disgusting to contemplate the devices to which many men of letters will stoop . . .' That such a book should be allowed to go forth with the *imprimatur* of a University – this is his theme. But the time will come –

the time will come, we trust, when Oxford and Cambridge will see the necessity of raising the study of our national literature to its proper level in education, and when neither dilettantism nor pedantry will be permitted to stand in the way of that study.

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Never were there stronger grounds for complaint, or a less diplomatic manner of complaining. Oxford itself was annoyed at the ridiculous over-carefulness which had elected Napier. If Collins had only stuck calmly to this just point. He was able to quote on his side many great names, men to whom he had written for support. There was Gladstone (though Gladstone had only been attracted by Collins's insistence that the study of English Literature should be joined to the study of Greek and Latin, and was careful to say that he 'strongly disapproved of all efforts to *displace* a classical education'). There was Matthew Arnold (who praised Collins's mission, but would not conceal from him that he 'had no confidence in those who at the University regulate studies . . . To regulate these matters great experience of the world, steadiness, simplicity, breadth of view, are desirable . . .'). More hearty were T. H. Huxley, John Morley, the Lord Chief Justice, Walter Pater, and – greatest testimonial of all, in the eyes of so many – Jowett, who was 'strongly of opinion that a place should be found for English Literature in the University curriculum.' Yet almost all these men, belonging as they did more or less permanently to the 'Ins,' began to wish they had written more coolly when he made his attack on Napier so altogether too personal an affair, particularly when he coupled it with an attack on Gosse, one of the 'Ins' himself, known by everybody, dining everywhere. Very quickly Arnold was writing to Collins again, with a change in his tone.

## LIT. ANG.

I am unwilling to appear in a question which is mixed up with the question of the merits of Mr. Gosse, with whom I am acquainted, though but slightly . . .

Arnold would have liked to back out of it, and no doubt he expressed the feelings of the rest.

The public, of course, had no special interest in Mr. Gosse. The demand continued. At last Mr. Goschen, as President of the Society for the Extension of University Teaching, officially approached the Provost of Oriel, pointing out amongst other things the increased demand for qualified teachers of English Literature. Officially, Oxford had no objections to receiving suggestions from outside, if they came from an official quarter. The impressive Mr. Goschen was very different from the gesticulating Mr. Collins. It was decided to take a first step. In 1887 Convocation was called and there was passed the preamble of a Statute to create a School of Modern European Languages. As an acknowledgment to this outside pressure, it was formally stipulated that in the syllabus of this School language and literature should have equal weight. Apart from this provision, the phrasing of the statute seems conservative enough. It can be quoted.

The subjects were to be 'the language and literature of the Teutonic, the Romanic and Neo-Latin, and the Celtic groups.' The examination in each language was to include the different periods of its history. Thus the examination in English was to include Anglo-Saxon and Gothic . . . language and literature were to have equal weight; but though

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proficiency in the colloquial use of a language might be indicated by a distinctive mark, yet this was to have no weight in the distribution of honours.

The Provost of Oriel explained the official nature of the source from which the suggestion of the School had come: he was able to produce a supporting memorial signed by Oxford scholars, including philologists. The framing of the preamble could not have been less provocative; indeed, many thought that he had been too careful. 'He hoped,' he said, 'that the study of literature would be essentially historical, and founded on the study of language. The provision that literature and language were to have equal weight would, no doubt, be interpreted in a rational way.'

This was rather too much. The Warden of Wadham sensibly suggested that it was no good offering philology if the demand from without was for a school of literature. Mr. Butler, of Oriel, went so far as to say that in these circumstances to make philology as important as literature was 'monstrous.' Indeed, the wind was taken out of the sails of even the implacable opponents of the literature idea, of Professor Freeman, and of Professor Earle, who as Professors of Modern History and Anglo-Saxon respectively felt themselves particularly threatened, and who had been collecting their forces against some such crisis as this since the dangerous days of 1877.<sup>1</sup> Professor Freeman could not quite make the speech he had prepared, and limited himself to say-

<sup>1</sup> If not 1850. Earle became Professor in 1849.

ing that he was glad to see that English was to be taken from its beginnings, and that he would pardon the use of the unscientific term 'Anglo-Saxon.' But the Slavonic languages ought not to have been omitted. And what was meant by distinguishing between language and literature, if by literature was intended the study of great books, and not mere chatter about Shelley, etc.? The direction of his sympathies was obvious; yet in the heat of the moment he had missed an obvious opportunity. More definitely than any one else Professor Freeman stood for the older Oxford. His venerable remarks carried exceptional weight. He was himself the most respected of all the 'modern subject' professors. He had always been an opponent of the reforms which led to the creation of the new schools, and he used to say he was glad he had been bred in the older Oxford, holding that the older syllabus, the examination in sixteen books at the end of four years, was a real test, and that it gave 'no such charming opportunities as are now provided for forgetting one subject before another is learned.' Hence he was more meticulous than any classical Professor in preventing any dangerous 'popularity' from entering into his history lectures. He tried to make his courses as 'minute' – to use a favourite word of his – as possible, and lectured on periods later than Gregory of Tours unwillingly, in a spirit of humorous resignation. It was sufficient, perhaps, that he should be vaguely disapproving. Nevertheless, Professor Freeman had missed one obvious

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point. In opening his case, the Provost of Oriel had quoted one terribly questionable authority, an anonymous authority, whose name was known, but never mentioned. To justify the combination of language and literature he had referred to the 'authorities' who had written to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and to a late article in the *Quarterly Review*. There must have been more than a slight stir of surprise when Professor Freeman seemed to take this so thinly veiled reference to Churton Collins lying down. But there was still Professor Earle to speak. He, too, was glad 'at the insistence on historical study.' The study of the earlier simplicity, he said well, would give the key to the later complexity of literature. The great evil of the subject was that there were so many who could write 'about and about' literature, and the article in the review already referred to was itself a proof of the ignorance which prevailed among those who did.

Whether this last remark referred to Mr. Gosse, Mr. Collins, or both, it was under lowering clouds that the preamble was carried by 82 votes to 24. But the opponents of innovation took this motion as a call to arms. Opposition pamphlets began to appear very quickly; counter pamphleteers replied; the opposition replied again. There was a general getting down to basic principles. What was literature, they asked? Professor Freeman, feeling that he had missed his opportunity in Convocation, now maintained that at any rate it wasn't anything that could be taught. You can't teach taste, or examine

in taste, he said. The whole thing would fall into the hands of fact-collecting crammers. And what are the facts of literature which crammers can collect? They would seem to be 'very largely nothing better than the gossip, the chatter about literature, which is largely taking the place of literature.' *Chatter about Shelley* became the slogan of the Noes: and the modern reader must substitute some phrase like 'chatter about Oscar Wilde' to realise the depths of disfavour which was implied.<sup>1</sup> And while the public demand became stronger than ever before, 'public' began to mean 'popular,' and in the minds of the Council the movement for literature began to be associated less and less with dignified Mr. Goschens and Matthew Arnolds, more and more with popular Mr. Churton Collinses.

On May 18th, 1887, Convocation met again to discuss proposals for the amendment of the statute.

<sup>1</sup> See correspondence in *Freeman's Life and Letters*, by W. R. W. Stephens, D.D. The sequence of letters give an understandable kind of context to his antagonism. 1887: 'If you followed me through all I published last year, you followed me through a great deal . . . [including] *Greater Greece and Greater Britain* (which I couldn't get anybody to take any notice of; but they might answer it if they don't like it) . . . I am planning as if I were safe to live as long as Ranke or Isocrates And all this, though I am reported of the "littery gents" to write the worst English of any man. . . .

★

'As for the Language Statute, do you know anything about these "littery" folk, what they mean and what they want? How is it a "fraud upon letters" that a Language statute should be a Language statute? And what do they mean by "letters" and "literature" apart from language? I suppose, as I said, they "want chatter about Shelley." I told them that we did not want to discuss "the Harriet problem" having enough to do with Helen, Theodora, and Mary Stewart.'

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The way the wind was blowing was indicated by the nature of the amendments. To the School was to be added Swedish, Danish, Lettic, Icelandic, Slav-ic. In the study of English, Anglo-Saxon was made compulsory by a large majority, and by an only slightly smaller majority, Gothic as well. In vain did Mr. Butler propose that literature should be more emphasised. Confident once more, Freeman (backed by Earle) took command. 'There are subjects,' he said, 'not fit for examination. The school was to be primarily a school of languages, and literature in the lower sense was to be excluded.' In vain did some now protest that this was to create a School which would leave out the Subject they had been called together to introduce. Most unfortunately, the President of Magdalen asked whether literature couldn't be included if it was 'subjected to classical handling.' There was a pause. This was obviously a piece of rank Churton Collinsism. Neither Professor Freeman, nor Professor Earle, thought it necessary to speak. Slowly, Professor Rhys rose to his feet. He trusted, he said, that the University 'would not be bullied or misled by articles in periodicals into a wrong course.' Mr. Butler's amendment in favour of the inclusion of Literature was rejected by 60 votes to 15. In the end not even the pruned version of the statute was passed, though the voting was remarkably close. 92 voted for, 92 against, so the statute failed to pass by one vote. Literature (in the lower sense) seemed put away for good. In vain did Churton Collins

compose long angry letters to *The Times* on the 'real nature' of recent events at Oxford. 'The country calls' (a 'University Extension Lecturer' wrote) 'for a school of literature,

an academic clique calls for a school of philology. The Extension Movement is positively impeded in consequence of the Council not being able to find a sufficient number of competent teachers in the subject most in demand – English Literature. . . . It is equally notorious that the Professors of Anglo-Saxon . . . cannot fill their classes.'

Of Earle and Freeman he would merely ask whether men 'whose notions of the nature and functions of literature or literary culture are such as these are quite the sort of persons to be entrusted with the control of the higher education of this country.' Freeman was no controversialist: neither was Earle. Earle could only say, with a rather undignified effort at dignity, that 'the council is really a body quite capable of judging for itself.' But Earle had one killing point. The author of the letters, he noted, called the 'Board of Studies' a 'Board of Directors.' Convocation, he pointed out, was not a business concern. 'One would think,' he wrote, 'that "Extension Lecturer" can hardly be an Oxford man.' <sup>1</sup>

It was true, though not in the sense the Professor implied. Had Collins been a little less un-Oxfordian, a little less a man with a good cause; if he had lec-

<sup>1</sup> Contemporary reports and letters in *The Times* have been a useful reference here.

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tured a little less often, and a little less articulately, to ever so slightly smaller audiences; if he had done even six weeks' research into a problem not of general interest – if he had ever done anything which could possibly have been called *minute*, not only might he have been first Professor; the vote of Convocation might not thus so flatly have contradicted the wishes of the majority in Oxford itself, of the vast majority outside.

This artificial delay meant that when Oxford finally gave way, seven years later, the jump was surprisingly big – straight into a separate Honours School of English, with Nettleship and Ingram Bywater backing it. When the memorial was presented to the Hebdomadal Council in 1891, it was only two years before the School became an accomplished fact. There were delaying referendums and amendments, of course, but on the 5th of December, 1893, Oxford fell. Convocation decided in favour of a Final Honours School in English Language and Literature by 110 votes to 70. The victory was won.

The defenders had to admit themselves beaten: but at any rate, they had killed Churton Collins. He published his book on it all: and the wisdom of his suggestions, and his power of grasping the new subject near the root, were lost sight of among his attacks, his accusations of trickery against the Council, his explosive anger at the thought of Napier. When the School was established, and no change in the Professor was made,

his irritation seethed again, boiling up in an anonymous article in the *Saturday Review* on an Oxford editor 'whose work was of no importance in itself but as an example of the kind of thing . . . etc.' Later still, his old opponents could have said to each other 'I told you so' when he made plans, in 1907, for a school of journalism, and at the same time brought out a text of Robert Greene which came up for much criticism for its textual inaccuracy. But by this time, though he had won a Chair of Literature at last, at the then melancholy University of Birmingham, his expectations of Oxford had gone at last. Once again, when the Professorship of Literature was separated from that of Language in 1904, he had been one of the applicants, confident once more, his hopes rising irrationally. It was rumoured that this time the authorities were to give more consideration to ability to teach, less to a reputation for minute scholarship. But by then another teacher had made his voice heard, a magic voice, as eloquent as Collins but more subtle, as scornful of pedantry, but offering more than a touch of creativeness to put in pedantry's place, expressing as great a belief in Literature, but less dogmatic as to how it ought to be taught – disarmingly doubtful, indeed, as to whether it ought to be taught at all. The day of Walter Raleigh was at hand, and Collins had to fade. It was no graceful self-effacement. There was another anonymous review of 'Twaddle from a Great Scholar' (this time Stopford Brooke was the victim). But not much more. Collins began to be

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forgotten. And soon a different kind of problem began to trouble the Council.

Oxford had fallen. But there was one more victory in store for the defenders.

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It has been said that there are three stages in the founding of a new University School. The war period of statute-passing and amendments, with the circumvention of anti-innovation men: the period of hard committee work when the statute is passed, of drawing up regulations; and finally the time of anti-climax when it is all over. Period three has its own difficulties. It suffers from the flat feeling which all idealists experience when their ideals are accepted.

After 1893, the anti-climax set in. Convocation and Literature, the battles over, were no longer 'news.' Worse still – and with secret delight the Freemans and Earles began to notice it – the whole thing seemed to be blowing over.

For one essential factor in the creation of a new School had been forgotten. There were no students.

When the day came for the first final examination, the nine papers were printed, but there was no one to write the answers. At the last moment, the three candidates scratched.

Next year, things were better: but the honours list may be reproduced:

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## *In Literis Anglicis*

Examiners: A. S. Napier. W. P. Ker. C. H. Herford.

### Class I.

Kelly, A. M. New.

### Class II.

Watkins, R. G. Jesus.

### Class III.

Nicholson, S. H. New: Ralli, A. J. Ch. Ch.

### Class IV.

None.

Notice the superscription of great names. We can sympathise with the feelings of these students, with what must have been an intolerable sense of isolation, 'pinned to the world beneath bare stars.'

True there were twice as many names on the women's honours list: and the numbers increased a little next year. But in 1899, again, there were only four men. Next year, not many more.

The reasons for this deficiency are so obvious that we only wonder that there were any students at all. The labours of the Board of Studies whose duty it was to draw up this new-born syllabus were haunted by the shocks of its uneasy pregnancy. There were language foster-mothers and literature foster-fathers to please, and the literature men, who ought to have been in the strongest position, were nevertheless at a disadvantage. They had no experience: there was

no tradition of literature-teaching. The language men knew exactly what they wanted: they were united, and confident. The literature men found that the more they thought about it the more doubtful they were as to what literature was, whether it really could be antagonistic to language at all, or how, if it was anything, it was to be taught: they had no confidence, no unity. In the end, a kind of judgment of Solomon had to be resorted to: the baby over which they were struggling was divided neatly down the middle; and four and a half papers were allotted to Language, four and a half to Literature. Such a division seemed unnaturally mechanical, and enlisted no faith in the authorities who had devised it. Again, in order to please all parties (except prospective students), the syllabus had been made, as pioneer syllabuses always are made, much too long. And yet again, though it was long, it was pointedly without trace of Churton Collinsism. In haughty disassociation from his outside suggestions, there was to be no intelligent attractiveness. The most useful of his proposals – the relating of English Literature with cognate modern literatures and the classics – was completely ignored. English Literature was to be kept strictly to its own incubator. And there were strict and bitter little additions to please the language men. Not only was Anglo-Saxon to be compulsory, but Gothic as well. It could almost be said, when it was finished, that the Literature School was less liberal and up-to-date than the classical. For quite recently the Classical School had undergone

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radical changes. At the beginning of the nineteenth century it would have been true to say that the teaching of Latin was still linguistic merely, with strong traces of times when the study of Latin was an essential step in the 'learned' professions – all texts and construing, with Bishop Butler and Aristotle's *Ethics* to supply the 'philosophy.' But now Plato and Bacon and Greek Tragedy had come in, and the School had become more truly humanist than it ever had been before, certainly more humanist than the new Lit. Ang., with its language-learning, and its literature crowded out with set books and glossaries.

Yet English Literature might still have made a fair start – if there had been anybody to teach it. Astounding as it must seem, though there was Napier at £900 a year, with assistance, for language; for literature there was Mr. Ernest de Sélincourt (confined to University College) at £50 a year – and that was all. In 1900 Mr. de Selincourt was given a lectureship: but still there was no professor. And still the authorities were surprised. The new School, they said, had not developed as had been expected. The turn of the century came. The new school did not develop at all. The older champions of the cause grew older, the struggle of the 'eighties began to be forgotten.

In other ways, in many ways, Oxford was changing rapidly. The reforms, long legally part of the constitution, were beginning to take effect. The Earles and Freemans were dying down. Other new

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Schools began to be effective. Even if the Anglo-Saxon lectures were not especially attended, greater innovations than this were becoming popular.

Moreover, a new attack was blowing up from another quarter. Some day it may be that the story of the descent of the women should be told at length. It is impressive; it had dramatic results on the health of Lit. Ang.

Close on the heels of Ibsen, emancipation, and the New Woman came the foundation of the Association for the Education of Women. Up comes the great date 1887, in which Miss Agnata Ramsay of Girton reached her celebrated position of first in the first division of the first class of the classical tripos. There was the historic hockey match which, in the eighteen-nineties, was played between Newnham and Roedean. Then the flaring rise of the new women's colleges. Now if there was one educational habit which the women carried to the University more than another, it was the English, and English literature. For its reputation for easiness, or for its unmasculinity, or for its uses in the home, English had been regularly taught at girls' schools in the 'sixties and 'seventies. It was vaguely connected with 'Art' – always considered right for women. For a very long time, the best English Literature teaching in the country was found in the new Girls' High Schools. Universities reflected this. As early as 1880, Oxford instituted special examinations for women, one of which was a test in English Literature and

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Language 'of a pretty high standard.' Women came from outside – e.g. from King's College – and by 1892 the Association had organised a systematic course of lectures and classes in English. At London, it was definitely becoming very popular among women. In the Oxford class lists, the first faint hint of anything like numbers is female. In '97, for instance, there were four men, but the not quite so miserably negligible quantity of ten women. Then rather suddenly in 1901 the numbers of women are twenty-one. Oxford stirred, uneasily. Would there be a sudden snowball growth of women literature students? Even a minor prophet might have foreseen this possibility. Lit has a marked feminine attraction, with its not unfeminine general ethic of humour, and emancipated Christianity; its heroic male figures, and honourable connection with female genius. The danger certainly existed – and who was there to cope with it, supposing this small keen interest swelled to a mass enthusiasm?

There was not even a Professor. Suddenly all was preparation and activity. A Professor must be found, and this time, moreover, he must be selected not for 'minute' qualifications, not for the tortuousness of the alley which in his scholarship he had explored, but for his merits as a lecturer, for proved enthusiasm for English Literature, for his ability to teach.

Who should be chosen? The choice was not so wide as it seemed at first glance. Churton Collins applied, and might even have been considered, had

he been one degree less Churton Collins. Saintsbury was available. But for some reason none of the obvious men seemed exactly right.

There was, however, one candidate who was not a candidate at all. Who had recently taken on a congenial professorship elsewhere, which he was in the midst of consolidating – a post decidedly better paid, also, than Oxford was to be. There was, in fact, Walter Raleigh. Raleigh was asked, and he refused. But the electors had made up their minds, convinced beforehand, apparently, that it must be Raleigh or no one.

To outsiders, his claims to this rather un-Oxfordian kind of solicitation did not seem so strong. At Cambridge, he had read the larky subject of History. He had taken a second, and not only refused to be wounded, as Saintsbury had been wounded, by this disgrace, but maintained that considering the extent of his application he was lucky to have been placed so high. Then to be Professor of English Literature at the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh, was an ominous start. Corresponding, in the Church, to a bishopric of Eastern Uganda, it was the kind of post from which no traveller returns. Yet when after an attack of dysentery he was mercifully ordered to give up the post and leave India, he actually tried to get back there on the chance of romantic explorations of the depth of Asia under the auspices of the Mahommetan Princes whose sons he taught. Samarkand . . . Bokhara. In England, he found it difficult to get

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work. He became damagingly linked with the Churton Collins atmosphere by touching the suspect world of Extension. It was not for two years that he got really started in his career, and even then it was at Owen's College, Manchester, which had not at that time any but the weakest literary tradition, which he hated, which had, he said, no soul. He did not seem to fit into the Academic world at all. 'I do not think this place will do for me,' he wrote. Authority there was 'new, vulgar and feeble,' and accordingly 'petty and jealous.' He began to think regretfully of Extension.

It is true that his talents as a lecturer must have been exceptional, otherwise he would not have been chosen, as he was in 1889, to succeed A. C. Bradley in Liverpool; and it is true that at Liverpool he began to write on his own. But if his book on Milton was respectable in subject and method of treatment, his history of the English Novel is in no sense a purely Lit survey, his choice of Robert Louis Stevenson as a theme must have seemed fantastically modern, his *Style* far from academic, and the only field in which he showed a tendency towards anything which could be called 'minute' research was in the subject of the Elizabethan explorers, which could only by a stretch be called a literary subject at all. To outsiders, his choice must have seemed eccentrically experimental. All the more impressive the absolute certainty of insiders, that he was the only possible man,

He was certainly the opposite end of the pole to

Napier: and it had been felt for a long time that Napier had been a mistake. Napier was not a lecturer at all; and yet though it was often said of Raleigh, that if he was uneven, on his day he was perfection, yet in my reminiscence of him Raleigh was not a lecturer either, if proper lecturing means the clear explication of facts. Recalling the many times I have heard him, I can only remember one opinion of his – something about Chaucer's humour, about his 'china eye.' The significant thing is that now after fourteen years one can *see* him: and one can recall precisely the sound of his voice. His appearance was memorable – the tallest man in Oxford, and seeming even taller because of his delicate structure and long sad face. We were silent before this ghostly tower, swiftly and quietly entering the classroom. His stride and his loftiness seemed always the result of a culture, never of a rank growth. And at the same time everything about him was subservient to his voice, his frame was a fragile sounding board to this resonant voice, which was never declamatory, was deep but conversational, as a cathedral might be conversational. When he read, his voice expressed some secret source of enjoyment. There was much reading in Raleigh's lectures – it was part of his general principle to concern himself with the books themselves rather than with 'books on' or even 'talk on.' Instead of lecture notes, he carried a volume stuck full of tabs under his arm, marking passages to be read. Though I cannot remember his criticism, what he read aloud I have

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never forgotten. For years, for instance, I have regarded the Foreign Gentleman passage in *Our Mutual Friend* as the essence of humour, I have campaigned for it as the perfection of subtle comedy, simply because I once heard Raleigh read it out, with scarcely a word of comment, but with such restrained passion, such badly concealed efforts to be impersonal about its merits, that I have laughed at it ever since. It was the same when he read poetry: one was convinced of its merits for the rest of life. He made it valuable. He was helped in this rather than hindered in his reading, I always thought, by the trembling affection of his hand, which made turning over the pages a distinct and difficult action, and screwed up the attention of the room. A helpful impediment, like Arnold Bennett's stammer.

Slade students who have been under Tonks will understand the effectiveness of Raleigh. One can be always comparing the two. Both tall in a striking way, and both with a way of talking unique enough for every student to imagine he could do a perfect imitation. Both great 'personality' teachers, speaking carefully and therefore unforgettably. Tonks for instance would come into the 'life' room and stand looking at some student's work, in no hurry to speak, no hint of approval or disapproval in his face. As the period of his silence extended, so did concentration on the coming comment harden, till at last it came, deep and brief, making the blame or the praise ('you haven't got a very elegant idea of the

human form') remembered for life. Raleigh, too, was memorable for his premonitory silences. In his social life, he was considered to be too much of a talker for effect, e.g. by Asquith, who said that his paradoxes were sometimes thin and remarkably foolish for so wise a man. It seems also that Raleigh could not pass that final social test, coping with the 'good talker.' A friend of mine spent one of the most miserable teas of his life, he says, when Bernard Shaw and Raleigh were both present. But Asquith's social story of him well illustrates an aspect of his effectiveness. Raleigh was once a visitor at a college high table, where a college wit, who had been brought in for the occasion, was in such good form that Raleigh, as usual in this situation, was reduced to deep silence. This silence alarmed his hosts, and when, after dinner, his reserve was maintained, he was asked, Well, what did he think of X? Nervously it was added: 'He is the life and soul of our common room, you know.' At last, after the correct interval, Raleigh answered, using his most cathedral voice: 'In the midst of life we are in death.' – The words spoken, no doubt, *valuably*. Tonks also had this power of public wit. Tonks and Raleigh were alike as teachers, too, in that though they were all for the old masters, as teachers have to be, and though Tonks especially was uneasy with anything later than Cezanne, yet both seemed unacademic, and had the reputation of having been revolutionary in their youth. Both were good disciplinarians, and could deliver snubs to any student who slid into their

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subject without any special motive, who 'took up literature,' 'went in for art.' Tonks would even countenance, for the sake of his sincerity, the painstaking unimaginative slogger. But Raleigh, unacademic again, was as down on those who slaved without discrimination, as on those whom he called 'the pups.' And he was bitterly unencouraging to students who spent their spare time studying literary 'influences,' or comparing unimportant texts. Above all, Tonks and Raleigh are linked as eminent teachers by their personality, by the awe which they inspired, by their assumption of authority (the kind of commanding which comes from an affection for the young and sympathy with their problems) and by their prestige and extra-academic reputation – the kind of men, in fact, in whom the life of education rests.

It is easy to understand Raleigh's fascination for students, not so easy to see, at first sight, how he came to appeal to selection committees. Note that he had twice been chosen to follow A. C. Bradley – in itself a sign that he was considered a good man. Even earlier Sadler had prophesied a future for him: 'My impression is that there will be eventually a large demand for your services.' In these Liverpool days, Raleigh had written very little. Why should he have been scrambled for?

First, no doubt, it was intelligent recognition of his great merits as a teacher. Second, there is no doubt that the academic selectors were fascinated by his unprofessor-like style. Any one connected

with the teaching world knows that the professor's hero is the professor's opposite, his antetype; knows that of his students the Professor admires most the least intellectual, the most sporting, or the one most obviously destined for pioneer work with the Afghanistan Development Company.<sup>1</sup> Of his contemporaries, he admires most the man of action, the explorer, the rebel against authority. Now whether Raleigh was himself fundamentally man of letters, or man of action, is a delicate problem: but to his colleagues he seemed a miraculous combination of the two, with the right manners, the right connections with scholarship, for University approval, and yet tastes for and concrete connections with the brave world of their ideal. They admired his scorn of the professorial attitude. They admired the fact that he himself was a writer famed beyond the university, writing on non-academic themes. And in these early days of the new subject, they, who had all been brought up, of course, in the older schools, were incredulously delighted when they heard of this man who doubted his own subject, who was casual about his own bread and butter, saying publicly, as he did in his inaugural address at Glasgow, that his was perhaps not a subject which ought to be taught, that anthologies were a blot, that notes on Shakespeare, if necessary, were necessary evils, and that at any rate Literature was not a subject

<sup>1</sup> This too-easy satire of a mythical 'Professor type' was, I fear, scarcely worth writing. It is a very long shot, based on inadequate information.

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which ought to be examined in. How different, incidentally, from the fanatical advocacy of Churton Collins.

In the end, Raleigh agreed to come. He started at Oxford in 1904. After a short opening pause the numbers did begin to go up. Soon, they began to mount faster. In a few years Lit. Ang. seemed to have spread more healthily than could before have seemed possible, and it seemed to spread beyond Oxford. Oxford, now at the control board of the new examination network, was promoted to new powers. It was inevitable that Lit should spread to other syllabuses, to school syllabuses. A snowball growth was easy to foresee. Schools needed Lit graduates to prepare boys to be Lit undergraduates. The subject grew out of its clothes: for a time there simply were not enough men with Oxford degrees to go round. At last even Cambridge, hanging fire with the obvious intention of coming in brilliantly at the last minute, began to move. The lectureship for which Skeat had campaigned had been created in 1896, and Israel Gollancz had held it unhelped for some years. But though the Literature Tripos did not officially start till after the war, the ground had been ten years prepared by the right sort of Professor holding a well-endowed Chair of a kind which could never legally have been held by a Napier. The terms of the endowment stipulated that the professor was 'required to treat this subject

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on literary and critical rather than on philological and linguistic lines.' In 1911, Quiller Couch, not incomparable to Raleigh, was elected. And then, to the general furtherance of Lit, a more than academic distinction was given to the subject by the founding, in 1917, of the English Association, which held dignified meetings periodically, and published the lectures of its speakers in pamphlets which looked like Government White Papers. There even seemed to be, in this great springtime, connecting-links – Raleigh and Q. two of these links – between the Lit world and the world of the real writers, the producers, the novelists, essayists, and poets of the time. The fact is that the typical Georgian writers, with their 'essentially English' atmosphere, their Masfieldian kind of nature description, their full-blown humour and humanity, their Georgian anthologies, their nostalgic, Rupert Brookian way of writing about youth, are not very far from Lit themselves, and play their own part in making this period – 1905, say, to 1920 – the true age of Lit. Ang. The war also, so far from exploding the beliefs and ideals native to this climate, intensified them. The only books to be read were those which allowed passage into the world of the past, or which substituted humour, or phantasy, for the unrealisable horror of the present. Soldiers would carry these antidote-books with them into the trenches, and would retire from association with pincushion gas blisters and corpse smells into Barchester and Walton. It was not till after the war that there was a change. New kinds of writers

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emerged, like Huxley, essentially opposed to Lit. And Raleigh died.

Final schools in 1922 – but no Raleigh.

He was to have examined. 'Just our luck,' we said: for we all believed that Raleigh would have seen from our English papers how we admired the same things that he did, would have understood our peculiar merits, and would have forgiven any vagueness about facts or dates for the sake of the fine prose and emancipated originality we knew we were capable of. All crowded in to hear Mr. Nichol Smith's lecture. The scheduled subject was put aside. 'I will speak to-day,' he said, 'about our Professor of Literature.' He did not say 'late' professor. The death had been unexpected. Raleigh had died of a fever caught during an aeroplane journey in the East – he had managed to get back there after all, making 'official observations' as historian of the Air Force. It fitted in perfectly with what we admired in him. All were alert at the lecture: Nichol Smith was pale. He gave a few brief facts of Raleigh's career. Near the end, he quoted the words of Ben Jonson on Shakespeare: 'I loved the man, and did honour his name on this side idolatry as much as any. He was indeed of a noble and free nature. . . .' I remember going off into a daydream at this. Even to one of his students, the words, applied to Raleigh, seemed natural and understandable. The truism which I had been made to realise for the first time was that Shakespeare also was a man for whom his friends could feel passionate regret.

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Raleigh was gone; and with Raleigh, the experimental novelty of Lit. Ang., its informality, went too. Never again, there was a feeling, could it appear a pioneering subject, nor was the informal Raleigh attitude to the classic English writers one which was ever likely to recur in academic circles. Through his discussion classes, even more than through his lectures, he 'was' the School. There would have to be a change. It was the end of a little epoch.

## IN THE DAYS OF THE REPORT

That change was necessary had been recognised before Raleigh's death.

After the war, though its central impulse was as obscure as ever, the ramifications of Lit were becoming so vast, its borders so expansive and encroaching, that it came under the notice of the State. In 1921 appeared the Board of Education Report on the Teaching of English.

Board . . . Education . . . Report – the three points of the Triangle of Dullness, the lay reader may think. Yet this Report is not dull. Nor does its relish depend, like most Government literature, on the ascetic excitements of graphs and tables. It seemed probable that the style, since ten eminent Litmen were responsible for its production, would be perfectly flawless, and perfectly flat, and that Board Language would be everywhere: 'the committee have been fortunate in securing the services of . . . when the course of enquiry has seemed to demand it, we have not scrupled to travel rather farther afield . . . unfailing energy and enthusiasm' – and so on. But not a touch of this. The ground covered is very wide, yet the whole is lightly and pregnantly written. Its recommendations, better than sensible, even have a strong hint of Principle behind them. The Report emphasises that changes are in the air. There is a

strong implication that the 'allowing the subject to take its own course' method could not last much longer. That the vague building up of syllabuses by the method of mere ground-covering could not last much longer. That to concentrate on thirty names because they headed the list in the Author's Order of Merit was as unsatisfactory as to choose an England eleven from the six batsmen and five bowlers at the top of the averages. That the mechanical twinning of 'Language and Literature' should wait on a clearer statement of such questions as How these subjects were related, How the study of one could assist the study of the other.

Indirectly, the Report emphasises change by making the early apologetic official attitude towards Lit. Ang. seem very old history indeed. Already, defence and attack are concentrated on the outgrowths, the machinery. The importance of the subject itself, even the supreme importance, is taken for granted.

Some of these outgrowths, and the Report's description of them, give the key to the Lit of the early 'twenties.

### *Examination*

Every Litman, of the first and second generation, always says that examination in Literature is an evil, or that it can't be done. Qualification for entry into their world, they imply, can only be tested by the intensity of self-indulgence with which the candidate is able to lean back in an armchair in a how richly wainscoted room for his savouring of the famous

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book. 'You can't examine in taste,' they say. Self-forgetfulness to the point of nose-picking, the luxuriating relapse into the cushion – tests for these cannot be spread over ten papers. It seems the one thing on which friends and opponents of the School are agreed.

Nevertheless, from the beginning of this last phase in its history, the influence of Examinations has determined the School's nature.

The Report is most clear-headed on this point, regretfully but frankly using the foxhunter's defence of hunting, that it preserves the fox. Were it not for its B.A.'s, and other letterings, the English School, in this age when a good degree is more valuable even than patronage, would have no students. Yet it is true that of all examinations, Literary are the most unsatisfactory.

The layman might have thought that literature, the art of self-expression in writing, was the one thing that a written examination could test. He cannot perfectly realise that these studies have no parallel with any other. To draw an analogy it would be necessary to invent an impossible situation – e.g. a student violinist whose work consisted in the attending of a series of violin recitals, but who was never asked to lay bow to string himself. A student who was asked to familiarise himself with the greatest creations of the most mature musical geniuses, and who yet was never made himself to compose one exercise in elementary counterpoint. In Lit. Ang., spite of polite official references, ability to

write better than merely grammatically does not count.

My personal impression of these exams in the early 'twenties is coloured by the fact that of those who took a Fourth Class in my year one, who has since done service to literature by interpreting through his acting the better parts of modern drama, rose from his seat and walked slowly and superbly from the room at the earliest legal minute (half an hour after the start of each three-hour paper); and two of the others are the only two, out of all the immediate post-wars, who are really established as writers, with some chance of eminence. It was only by means of despairing dishonesty that one of these two got so far as the degree stage. For the intermediate examination a Latin Unseen is obligatory. With practically all the Language ducts of his mind plugged by public school classics masters, my friend knew that any kind of unseen translation was out of the question for him. His future degree, his future career, depended on his being able to produce some kind of English version of fifteen lines of Latin prose. On the first day (with the Unseen still 48 hours removed), examination-room neighbours were observed. North-east, north-west, south-east, south-west, sat inscrutable strangers. Chattily, after the morning paper was over, my friend found out names and colleges. Which of the four Guardian Angels, presumably beyond any fear of the Unseen, would consent to protect him? Private visits were made. Which would agree to drop on the floor, by accident,

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in his direction, the screwed-up ball of the discarded rough copy? North-east spoke of the dangers. North-west, regarding it as one of those tests which he had been told come sooner or later to all young men, was glad to find himself able to say to himself that his course was clear. Politely, he pretended not to understand the question. South-east answered, possibly with perfect truth, that he was equally bad at Unseens himself, but south-west – ah, south-west was perfect. Enthusiastic agreement, full of suggestions, introducing new safeguards, insisting on rehearsals at which he trebled the parts of invigilator, dropper, and picker-up – and a good translator.

It is easier for the examiner to take an objective view of these tests than the cowed examinee. I believe that the examination world brings to light two fairly constant 'examination types.' One of these is the 'good student,' whose fountain pen slides and skates exhibitionistically over the page. Off glides sentence after easy sentence. Page after page. She (it is often a 'she') enjoys herself. She is rising to the occasion, she feels: she paralyses her neighbour by calls for extra sheets of paper, and as often as not she is doing what is required, answering the questions in the expected way, with the right knack, grammatically, a student whom the examiner may feel himself compelled to mark highly, even though in almost every sentence there is a phrase of sickening triteness. Writing of Chauntecleer and Perte-

lote, in the Nun's Priest's Tale, she will say (to transcribe an actual answer):

We do not gain the impression that she was in any way a nagging wife, but that her quiet, determined insistence persuaded Chaunticleer to go forward to his daily life with courage and confidence.

And if the necessary knowledge of facts has been shown, as it probably has, what can the examiner do? Official requirements are satisfied. He can only let his feelings go subterraneously, by a sudden sarcastic phrasing of a question (Saintsbury's impatient '*Without* remarking that the thing became a trumpet in his hands, say something relevant about Milton's sonnets'). Or by behaving like W. P. Ker, who would flay in phantasy, scribbling in the margins of the papers he was correcting rudenesses which would never be seen:

THE STUDENT: 'Chaucer was a vehicle for the loftiest flights of the imagination.'

W. P. (*in the margin*): 'A flying machine.'

THE STUDENT: 'The Fairy Queen was the highest point English poetry had achieved.'

W. P.: 'But the Fairy Queen has magnitude.'

Examinee type 2 is the antithesis of this. He arouses the examiner's sympathy as surely as the first estranges it. This is the dumb rebel, who has taken to the subject, as so many do, because he was allowed no alternative, or had no clear wishes in the matter. In the heat of the examination crisis he will turn at last, sullen in the face of what he feels to be a stupidity

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and an insult. I will quote, on pages 226-7, one of these revengeful efforts to stave off an Intermediate Lit. Ang. paper. The man I know. In the presence of carburettors, of timing systems even, he is cool, economical, direct, impressive, and happy. Now he is surly, and sensible of ineffectiveness, a victim of the indistinct aims of Lit. He hangs over a question: I will quote it. He worries out an answer: I will transcribe it. Question 1 was a 'gobbet' question ('annotate and give the context of the following') on two Shakespeare plays, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. The (a) quotation, from *LLL*, Armado's soliloquy at the end of Act I, was

Adieu, valour! rust, rapier! be still, drum! for your manager is love; yea, he loveth.

The (b) quotation was Antony's superb remark to his 'sad captains,' that he would 'force the wine peep through their scars.'

Question 2 read 'What auguries of Shakespeare's greatness do you find in *Love's Labour's Lost*?'

The power of these answers undoubtedly comes from the contempt behind them. The burlesque of the lecture material, if unconscious, is a real revenge against the autocracy of Lit, against the curt commands he has been receiving in his papers to DISCUSS THIS, EXPAND THAT (or we'll expand you, rack you). Or he may be dumbly resentful of the way in which simple questions, which he might have answered, have been put in a complicated way. Instead of 'Do you remember any of the similes in Paradise

Write on both sides of the Paper, *except* in Arithmetic and Mathematics, in which subjects the *right-hand* page only should be used.

1. (a). "adieu, valour! . . . ."

This is by Enobarbus about Anthony (in Anthony and Cleopatra) – Anthony has fallen in love with Cleopatra, and stays with her instead of going on his job as a soldier. The 'manager' is Anthony's arm. Enobarbus is half speaking in fun and half ironi

satirically – iencally. Enobarbus although one of the minor characters, seems to be to be the most human. He is the only one who stands out in my mind after some time having elapsed since I saw the play – and while he is mainly 'light relief' he has a large element of the serious in him, and in my opinion, a good part of the more beautiful speech is allotted to him eg; when he describes Cleopatra's barge – the actual substance may be rather ridiculous, but I love the sound of it.

(b) The man who said this was referring to the 'party' which was held on the boat. It is was a party in which the guests more than ful-

Write on both sides of the Paper, *except* in Arithmetic and Mathematics, in which subjects the *right-hand* page only should be used.

filled the prophesy. Lepidus in particular changing from a sober statesman to a ridiculous figure of drunkenness.

— This is what the speaker means when he says he'll force the wine to peep through their scars., ie make them so full of wine that it will peep through. It is a curious mixture of the English way of thinking it unusual, if not a disgrace, to be drunk, and the Roman custom of going on drinking till they were — The speaker was the ally of the Captian of the barge — I cannot recall his name.

2. Although the Plot in Love's Labour's Lost is practically nil, and threads are left hanging and unconnected (as in the passage about Aquitaine which is heard of no more.) and although the characterisation is practically nil also, with the exception of Biron and Rosaline, there are occasional Flashes of obvious genius ———

Lost, Books 1 and 2,' he has been asked 'How do Milton's similes reflect his classicism of spirit?' It may be that he has been ordered to 'write an appreciation of the characteristics of Cowper OR (OR, OR, OR, you idiot, not both) Crabbe,' and he may be cursing himself that he hasn't learnt by heart the scribbles in his notebook headed 'Char. of W. Cowper.' Or he may have been asked (as the Report suggests) to 'discuss Browning's views on life and religion' and be left obscurely annoyed, insulted, and inarticulate. Or he may have had the bad fortune to meet with an 'original' examiner, a man who only sees himself in print in an examination paper, who asks 'good' questions, invents a witty 'quotation' which he shows to admiring colleagues, uses a phrase from *Alice in Wonderland*, etc. (It was in revolt against this unfair habit, mystifying to the struggling candidate, that Masson invented a simple but cogent examination question which he repeated every year.) Or he may – worst luck of all perhaps – have been asked one of those apparently fair but really cruelly difficult what-is-the-plot questions, those debasing fact questions, of which the classic example<sup>1</sup> is from that School Certificate paper on the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. 'Give a careful account of what happens to the four lovers in the wood until they are awakened by Theseus.'

The Age of Examinations has had its bad effects,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in what is still the best essay, for information and wit, on School Literary Examinations – contributed by L. C. Knights to *Scrutiny*, September, 1932.

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in spite of its professional uses. Often the wrong kind of student, the slick student, has been encouraged, the right kind has been antagonised. A promising student has been made to feel inarticulate and given a permanent habit of unsucces by failure in what is only a limited test of excellence – has been made to suffer because he chances to have inherited some examination-room claustrophobia, examination amnesia, some 'slowness off the mark.' It may even happen, in the Final of the Lit Schools, that the hard-boiled competent student made confident by ignorance that he has 'got' the whole subject may be promoted over the student made tentative by the consciousness of ignorance which his greater powers of apprehension give him.

But thus it is. The post-war Lit is (1) a world of exams, examinees, examiners, and examinification.

### *Syllabus*

It is (2) the world of the attendant syllabus.

The Report hints at the unwieldiness of the kind of syllabus which was growing up in the 'twenties.

A tendency to swell ungovernably is a constant habit of Literary syllabuses. With however strict a principle of self-denial they may be planned, no one has so far evolved one of reasonable size. Let the reader try to construct one himself. Cognate subjects which will make all the difference instantly suggest themselves. How understand English Literature if nothing is known of its origins (Old English and older Germanic and Scandinavian languages).

But how easy even the Report found it to show that English authors owe just as much, if not more (through Chaucer, Wyatt and Surrey, Spenser), to the European literatures of the early Renaissance, to French and Italian (and, behind them, Mediæval Latin, and behind that of course The Classics, with their innumerable subsequent infiltrations). And then, if one is to consider what the writing is about, surely just a half-term course on the *history* of the period – and how useful just another half-term, on the sociology. Bar what-it-is-about, the chooser often says. But then surely æsthetics: and if æsthetics is in, surely the background of thought is essential, history of philosophy: and so on.

Those who believe that the turning of Literature into a separate subject has only been brought about by a fallacious classification comparable to a grouping of plants by shape of leaf instead of by machinery of reproduction will say that this finding of cognate subjects which seem to go nearer to the root of the matter is inevitable.

It was perhaps in realisation of this that syllabuses in the days of the Report were made defiantly watertight in their adherence to the purely Lit. Social History was politely mentioned, but beyond that nothing. The Literary character was carefully preserved and emphasised in such sub-divisions as *Age of Dryden*, *Age of Johnson*, *Romantic Revival Period, 1798* (date of 'Lyrical Ballads') *to 1832* (beginning of Tennyson). Never French Revolution (for all its influence on the subject matter of English writing)

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to 1832-date-of-the-Reform-Bill. The last half of the eighteenth century is Walpole, Bishop Percy, and the 'first seeds of Romanticism.' Never Blake and the break from Materialism. In the choice of authors, the purely Lit men are foregrounded. From these later syllabuses men who wrote and were also famous for their part in contemporary life, like Locke and Clarendon, drop out, although they took a leading place to begin with.<sup>1</sup> Very often the categorisation is not by period at all, but by literary type. – History of Satire. Rise and Decline of the Elegy. Not infrequently it follows the shape or pattern made by verse on the printed page. Thus, 'Beginnings of the Heroic Couplet,' 'Later history of the Sonnet,' though this kind of classification, if Literature itself is a subdivision of organisms by the outline of the leaf, is a subdivision according to the shape into which they have been pruned. Pollardaceæ.<sup>2</sup>

### *Lecture*

Always to be remembered in connection with the new Lit of the 'twenties is the race of eager, newly elected Lit lecturers, pushed up by the new popularity of the subject.

Any remarks on lecturing must start with the reminder that lectures themselves are an anachron-

<sup>1</sup> A reminiscence from Dean Farrar, old pupil of F. D. Maurice, reminds how freshly chosen was some of the earlier material: 'I will never forget the originality of his remarks on Milton's translation of the Ode to Pyrrha, or Johnson's letter about the Falkland Islands.'

<sup>2</sup> An exception must be made of the Cambridge arrangement, with their 'Life, Literature and Thought from 1350-1603,' etc., divisions.

ism: that they belong to the days before text-books, before printing, when students were dependent on the lectured word for knowledge. The necessity has passed, but the habit remains. Sidgwick,<sup>1</sup> describing a lecture at a German University in the last century, well expresses the sense of anachronism with which one can suddenly be possessed. Into the hot and crowded room came the eminent man

according to custom, punctually at the quarter; he carried in his hand a MS. yellow with age; he did not seem to look at his audience, but fixing his eyes on his MS. he began to read it aloud with slow monotonous utterance. I glanced round the room; every pupil that I could see was bending over his notebook, writing as hard as he could. The unfamiliar surroundings and the unfamiliar language stimulated my imagination, and I found myself back in a world more than four centuries old, in which it had not yet occurred to Coster or Gutenberg that it would be a convenience to use movable types for the multiplication of copies of MS.

English Literature, with all its books about the subject, and books about books about the subject, would seem to be least in need of this kind of lecturing, and to be furthest away from that kind of lecture-room teaching which will always be essential, demonstration. Professor Raleigh, addressing his Glasgow audience for the first time, quoted Dr. Johnson:

People have nowadays got a strange opinion that everything should be taught by lectures. Now, I cannot see that lectures can do so much good as reading the

<sup>1</sup> In *A Lecture Against Lectures*.

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books from which the lectures are taken. I know nothing that can be best taught by lectures, except where experiments are to be shown. You may teach chemistry by lectures: you might teach making of shoes by lectures. . . .

When Raleigh was starting, he had succeeded a lecturer who had delivered pure notebook matter ('it is very good of Professor Ward to lend me all his MS. lectures, but from a study of them I have been compelled to think but poorly of them'). Raleigh had different ideas. Full of pioneering enthusiasm and deepest pleasure in his subject he was looking forward, like these later lecturers of the 'twenties, to the great pleasure of reading with a class, say, *Henry IV*, or Boswell, or Burns – to describing his reading experiences and his poetic experiences, passing on his delights to others by process of conflagration. And Raleigh, like the rest of them, found himself up against the blank wall of the Lit syllabus:

I made some remarks on Poetry in general which cost me more than fifteen matter-of-fact lectures, and they laid down their pens and smiled from an infinite height. So I must just boil down text-books in the recognised fashion.

He did nothing of the kind because he had the prestige and ability to teach in his own way. But for the average lecturer the circle was vicious.<sup>1</sup> Note-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mr. F. R. Leavis, writing in *Scrutiny*: 'Even the supervisor who remains vividly aware that examination-success . . . [has no connection with educative success] . . . finds himself, again and again, answering the innocently practical question with innocently cynical advice.'

giving still existed in the 'twenties because the note-taking student still existed because the examinations still existed because the syllabus still existed, in all its vastness, making short cuts to its examinable core an imperative necessity.

### *Thesis*

It is not without some dismay that the Report contemplates the kind of 'good student' thrown up by this system. The good Lit student writes post-graduate theses, undertakes 'really valuable pieces of research.' Or are they really valuable?

It is a mistake to turn off a student into some little side track to research in some unimportant subject simply because it has not been done before. . . . Many of the elaborate Theses on English Literature produced by American students for their Doctorate, and afterwards published, are monuments of misdirected effort. . . .

American students and English as well. The titles of some of these Works represent the final absurdity of Lit classification: 'The Development of English Journalism, 1740-1750.' 'The Sea in English Literature from Beowulf to Donne.' What else can the student do? Every year the queue lengthens as the students wait at the doors of their supervisors. What shall we do now? What shall we write about? Bravely the library catalogues are combed. Surely there must be Somebody whose biography has not been written within the last twenty years. It is useless for Professor Karl W. Bigelow, of the University of Buffalo, to point out in his *Manual of Thesis Writ-*

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*ing*,<sup>1</sup> chapter 'Requirements of A Good Topic,' that the graduate, before he chooses his theme, must ask himself: '1. Is the subject worth investigation? 2. Is it a job that I want to tackle?' The good topics soon became used up, and it is fearful to watch the cynicism, or worse still the fascination, with which the student at last brought his bright new harness of scholarship, method, and verified references to dress the useless facts of the uneventful life of a mediocrity. I hold such a thesis in my hand. 'RICHARD BRATHWAIT, an Account of his Life and Works, by M. W. \*\*\*\*\*. Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Pennsylvania in Part Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.' The process by which the writer deceives himself as to the usefulness of his great labour can be seen in action:

Richard Brathwait [a hack Restoration journalist] has been strangely neglected by literary historians. . . . Voluminous and versatile as he was . . . rarely deemed worthy of more than a mention in even the most inclusive histories of English Literature . . . only one of his fifty-odd volumes has been reprinted . . . an obvious reason for this neglect is the purely contemporary nature. . . . To lovers of the seventeenth century, however, the works of Brathwait are of very little interest. . . .

No wonder the Report is uneasy. It is for students of the immediately post-graduate age that this kind of work is most dangerous. Pedantry and fact col-

<sup>1</sup> This book really exists

lecting are characteristics of *youth*, and the 'old professor' type is simply one in whom characteristics natural to all of us are prolonged and stressed unnaturally by some such habit-forming work as this.

The Report is anxious to preserve the School from becoming a breeding ground for pedants. 'It should become a true School of the Humanities.'

### *Language*

This emphasis is repeated when in its turn is taken the great Language Question.

It was still, in 1922, a question of Literature *versus* Language. But since 1890 the battle had taken an entirely different turn. Then Language had been quietly victorious. Literature had been amiably accepted in principle, but the Professor, Napier, was a Language man, and the authorities intended that the real foundation of the School should be Anglo-Saxon and Philology. Now the boot was on the other foot. The foetal or struggling literature men of the palæolithic era were now the rulers. With great play of scrupulous fairness, the Report is down on Language.

A comparison is made with Lit. Hum. Implied only, but nevertheless strongly and bitterly implied, is the charge that in the early days language was insisted on in a schoolmasterish spirit, as a disciplinary dose of medicine to balance the easy-going jamminess of literature. The charge hinted at is that all the advantages of studying *English* Literature, with its absence of language impediment, were taken away

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by spending unnecessary time on difficult early English dialects, and by the too verbally detailed analysis of naturally straightforward English classics such as Shakespeare. The report puts it in a different way. It points out the twofold nature of the study of the classical authors, (*a*) scientific, for their language, and (*b*) non-scientific, for their art. And it points out that with Lit. Hum. there had been a temptation, among teachers, to concentrate too much on the science side, because, though this was much less pleasant to learn, it was far easier to teach. 'There is a danger,' they suggest, 'of the same thing happening with the teaching of English Literature.'

Strangely different attitude from 1890, and in the course of a discussion on pro-and-con lines, important doubts are raised as to the necessity at all of a language side of the older sort. For (*a*) the question is asked, is not Old English prose of negligible literary value, and is even Old English poetry good enough to be worth the arduous language learning involved? On the other hand (*b*) so far as the second reason for this study is concerned – that in Anglo-Saxon can be discovered the root of modern English thought and culture – are there not grave doubts here too? If it is the case that Chaucer was a breaker away from English originals rather than an adapter of them, would it not be more logical to study those French and Italian sources which helped him to escape from tradition? The Board feels sure enough of its position to suggest, without referring directly to the fact, that there really did exist this much-

questioned break in the continuity of our literature between 1100 and 1300; that it is extremely difficult to point at anything which could seriously be called 'typically English' before the first of these dates: that it is not absolutely ridiculous to say that before Chaucer's time there *was* no English nation sufficiently integrated to present constant characteristics in its literature: and there were members who pointed out, unofficially, that of the most notable pre-Chaucerian poems, *Sir Gawain* and *Beowulf*, the first is essentially French, and the second essentially German.

But the Report preserves its moderate tone until it comes to philology. Here indeed the Members allow themselves to release some pent-up dislikes, revenge against a former despotism. Eminent witnesses are quoted.

Sir Walter Raleigh is quoted: English Literature 'needed to be freed from slavery to philology and phonology, except so far as these bear on Literature.' He deprecated the hunting of 'hypothetical sound-shiftings in the primeval German forests.'

Mr. Nichol Smith is quoted: he 'regretted as a very great misfortune for the study of the English language' the adoption of 'German methods.'

Professor Chadwick explained how 'English studies came to be regarded largely through German glasses.'

The committee themselves blame Germany, and misplaced philological energies. It suggests new ways of combining language and literature, in which

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philology, so far from being compulsory, is confined to the post-graduate research stage. An on-their-own-head-be-it attitude. It suggests the substitution of semantics for Philology, the history of the changes of the meaning of a word, instead of the history of its change of form. . . . The old kind of language study, large proportions of compulsory old and middle English, with Gothic, seemed doomed.

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Language was still a crucial question. Even if the fortunes of war had blown it into a position of defence, it was from language men that the main criticism of the Report came – from G. C. Moore Smith, who quotes Jespersen in support of his disagreement with the Report's recommendation of a common grammatical terminology, and most notably from Dr. R. W. Chambers, great Language leader of University College London, who in pamphlets, and later in a long eloquent Introduction (to a sixteenth-century Life of Sir Thomas More), on the 'continuity of English prose,' denied that breaks in its history existed, said that historical and linguistic gaps before the Conquest and before the Reformation were not gaps at all, and that to fancy their existence was a bad example of 'seeing what you expect to see,' were stumblings into that 'pitfall which lies before us all, as Dr. P. S. Allen has said, that we read history, knowing the event.' By means of beautiful quotations from the *Ancren Riwele*, and the *Fall of the Angels*, Professor Chambers sought to show that the stream of English Literary inspiration could only be made to appear to flag by irrelevant emphasis on (e.g.) the badness of Wiclif, and recommending the Board to read *Deor* and *Maldon* to learn the spirit of the heroic age, he denied that Universities were under German

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domination, denied that classical students were not made to read the earliest classical texts, denied that it was possible to conduct an English School without the study of Old English.

Dr. Bailey answered: 'Dr. Chambers and we are not aiming at the same thing. We deliberately chose as large a measure of freedom as possible: he prefers the old system of park palings and compulsion.' I have quoted the one unfriendly sentence out of 200. There was no asperity. Dr. Chambers replied once more, in a footnote, expressing his mild preference for Mediæval English over Mediæval Latin. He maintained, on the other hand, his fondness for Literature.

### *Change Recommended*

But leaving out the question of language, nearly all the 105 recommendations of the Report are difficult to criticise, and are full of sound suggestions – e.g. (to choose at random) that 'oral examinations should be resorted to more frequently,' that 'if the exportation of early printed books and manuscripts cannot be prevented, the deposit, in the principal libraries of the U.K., of photographic facsimiles of them should be made compulsory,' that an English 'Mods' might be followed by an English 'Lit. Hum.,' that '“commercial English” is objectionable to all who have the purity of the language at heart, and also unnecessary,' that play production should be made a part of an English course, that Elementary Schoolchildren should be taught to speak standard

English, and that the teaching of English should be entrusted to teachers with a love of it.

Still more inexpugnable is the general conclusion, the Principle which is reiterated so often when there is an end-of-the-chapter atmosphere, that the school of literature should become a true School of the Humanities. With an almost dangerous eloquence it is maintained that 'the vital thing is to make it obvious from the outset that literature is alive, that it is the sublimation of human thought, passion, feeling, that it is concerned with issues which are of universal interest, that in short it is flesh and blood and not stucco ornamentation.' 'Books,' the Committee point out, 'are merely the instruments through which we hear voices.' Literature 'introduces the student to great minds and new forms of experience'; is 'a means of contact with great minds, a channel by which to draw upon their experience with profit and delight. . . .'

As a general recommendation, how right, and how fundamental. And how natural that it is the failure of the Report to give definite direction to this object which has made its attempt to bring about any deep change ineffectual. For these phrases are of this nature, that their degree of operative truth – their 'seminal' power, to use Coleridge's word, is relative to the speaker. They represent flat sapience or courageously won knowledge according to the degree of experience behind them: and this seminal knowledge it is very difficult for a Committee to earn the right to utter. The perilous

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question of how this 'contact with great minds' can be brought about, what sort of experience can be taught and what cannot, what kind of experience is valid for what period of growth – all these questions are left unanswered: and the committee stops short where one man might have begun.

Change came, but whatever the cause, it was in no sense a change for which the Report could be held responsible.

### *Change Effected*

The flourishing, during the war, of period authors has been described. It was natural to retire from military training into the mental tent which novelists like Trollope, or essayists like R.L.S., offered. Then immediately after, for a year or two Oxford was not herself. Pedantry faded, not before the scorn, but before the fatherly encouragement of returning freshmen D.S.O.'s, anxious to taste the homely undergraduate sensations they had been robbed of. In spite of their wishes, the literature of action flourished, Bowdlerisation became a thing of the past, Professors, especially of Literature, preferred to be known as plain 'Mr.' And Lit, 'taking its own shape' according to the original plan of the Oxford School, perfectly reflected this new attitude. Raleigh, least academic of masters, stood at the head. Literature was the domain of the voyagers and the warriors, the direct and the forceful and the simple. (His letters show how perfectly Raleigh epitomises this

period, not badly illustrated by the following quotation from one of them:

Bradley's book on Shakespeare is good. Of course it is not nearly gutsy enough, but he gets there all the same. Even with it I can't help feeling that critical admiration for what another man has written is an emotion for spinsters. Jerome K. Jerome is in some ways a far decenter writer than Brunetière or Saintsbury or any of the professed critics. He goes and begets a brat for himself, and doesn't pule about other people's amours. If I write an Autobiography it shall be called 'Confessions of a Pimp.')

But Raleigh, teacher by force of personality, died; and the lack of plan suddenly began to be a nuisance. The vagueness increased. 'The first literature course, from Chaucer to Wordsworth, with special study of Chaucer, Spenser and Milton, will be found a good preparation for those who contemplate a literary life.' Thus rambled the Oxford University Handbook. This might possibly have passed in 1914, but in 1925 . . . For Galsworthy – Aldous Huxley. For Masfield – Eliot. The analytic attitude, the realist attitude towards the war – Lit itself suddenly began to seem 'period.'

### *Cambridge and Aristotelianisation*

The new scientific attitude, and not the recommendations of the Report, was the source from which the new Lit of the later 'twenties was to spring. The new attitude came not before it was needed. Warmly felt but indecisively manipulated

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desires to 'bring students into contact with great minds' had given birth to a crop of indistinct phrases born of blunt sensations. It was suggested to students that they ought to know what to say about great works. Striplings two feet high in experience thought it perfectly natural to find themselves passing judgment on the giants of life, and for machinery with which to do this they could draw on phrases from the English Men of Letters series . . . 'strong vein of mysticism . . . typical of the fervid idealism of this period,' etc.

A lecturer of Cambridge (Cambridge had fallen at last) took the lead in dredging away some of this congestion with his *Principles of Literary Criticism*. After making a very satisfying ruin of this particular Lit growth, the author, I. A. Richards, suggested a way to give criticism plan, and attempted to establish an absolute theory of value by which literature might be measured.

Almost at once, Richards found himself with an ardent following. There was at least one educational moral to be drawn from his success. The Report had suggested that analysis of the Language, and the more purely scientific aspects of the subject, should be relegated to the post-graduate stage. The general principle implied here is that 'humanism and self-development through contact with great minds' belongs to early youth; category work and exact measurement and analysis to the fully developed adult. The opposite is the truth. What wonder that science-starved young students fogged by gener-

alities took to Richards with almost passionate thankfulness? Instead of a littish, contemplative, nostalgic stew of 'appreciation,' here was a training, a system, with results, with something to remember.

### *B.Sc. Lit*

With even more avidity did Lit-fogged students take to even more laboratory-like innovations which sprang up elsewhere. I shall never forget the delight with which, at one college, literary students in a small underground cellar (rather grudgingly allotted out of the scientific block) left palatial EDWARD VII libraries and CECIL RHODES lecture-rooms to watch an enthusiastic demonstrator explain the workings of a voice-recording instrument, while a finely balanced needle furrowed a sharp and exact track on the soot smeared over a revolving brass cylinder.<sup>1</sup> I shall always remember the happy pride with which young men, depressed by being lectured to about the 'word-music of *L'Allegro*,' were able to move about among beautiful brass and steel, to plot the sound graph which 'was' that poem, or the way in which, unconsciously whistling between teeth in the manner of the contented worker, they could make drawings of the larynx, preserved in spirit, of

<sup>1</sup> 'One method of studying speech is that of making graphic inscriptions. The person speaks into a celluloid mouthpiece surrounded by an air cushion and held tightly over the mouth. The movements and vibration of the air pass down a wide rubber tube to a membrane of oil silk. A straw lever with a fine flexible steel point attached to the membrane inscribes the movements and vibrations on a moving surface of smoky paper.' 'The Atomic Structure of Speech,' by F. Janvrin. (*Extrait des Archives Néerlandaises de Phonétique Expérimentale.*)

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the human voice which produced it – could read how ‘the one-dimensional vowel-profile received by the liquid became a three-dimensional profile at the lamina basilaris and is communicated to the brain as a nerve-current profile,’ or could study diagrams of the structure of the cochlea, with the scala vestibuli in plan, the larger scala tympani, the diagonal membrana vestibularia, and the delicately separating ligamentum spirale cochleæ.

These fresher pleasures, this substitution, for foggy ‘appreciations,’ of the visual-tactile pleasures of the laboratories, this concentration on such more tangible subjects as palæography, bibliography, and printing (there is a Press at University College) mark the direction of the turn taken by the subject since the Report. To-day’s Lit. Ang. might have held honourable position in the syllabuses of Sander-son of Oundle, and most of the data of what is now thought of as the progressive side of the subject are as satisfyingly verifiable and predictable as a star’s density, or the degree of glassiness in the fracture of a stick of potassium.

Have the suggestions of the Report, or the ship-shape new surface bestowed by the new Scientific Treatment, given Lit a new lease of life? It seems Yes. Obviously, also, Lit has been improved by the cleaning up it has received, even if the purpose and objects of literary study have not been made any clearer.

Yet it is unfortunate that these purposes still

remain vague. Those unassailable Conclusions, that warm official desire to promote 'self-development resting on an intensified sense of human personality and its claims' – true in how central a sense. Yet do the new scientific developments of the 'twenties radiate from that centre? Lit, it has been suggested, suffers from a loose treatment of externals. The treatment has been improved out of all knowledge. Loose talk about dates of books is disciplined into organised bibliography and bench-work on the setting of type. The good old fifty-fifty division between 'literature and language' is humanised, interesting optionals are suggested from cognate tongues, and now that it is possible to get out of language altogether, there is no longer the same distaste; keen young philologists arise. For vague talk of 'cp. and cf.,' are references pertinent and twice verified, daring researches, interesting explorations, field work, with splendidly finished and human pieces of research like Lowes' *Road to Xanadu* in the background as models. Reform has been specially active to clean up the vagueness of 'appreciations,' to do away for ever with hang-dog reproduction, by the cowed examination student, of eulogies from the text-books, or imitation-indignant castigation of faults. Farewell for ever, we believe, 'spoilt by the strong vein of personal animosity'; goodbye for good, 'the nature he describes is typically English in its quality.' At last even Opinions have been cleaned up. In fact strong attempts have been made to force down that thickest plank in the platform of the early

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Oxford antagonists to Lit, the notion that you 'cannot examine in taste.' There is a strong inclination to set aside a room in the physics or biology laboratory for the purpose of demonstrating that even taste is verifiable. Tests may even now be on foot, in laboratories of psychological research, to measure the blood pressure before and after reading *Tintern Abbey*, or to grade increases of gland secretion after reading an Elizabethan sonnet sequence. And this kind of treatment, because experiments are jolly, gives the student a satisfactory feeling that he is getting somewhere, and allows him to become familiar with the beautiful instruments of science at which hitherto he has had to gaze wistfully from afar. How preferable to the old days of Lit *laissez-faire*.

Yet, 'self-development . . . intensified sense of personality . . . linking experience . . .' How does this modern improvement grow from these purposes? What has been done? Treatment has been improved, but motive and principle are left as vague as ever. It is doubtful whether even Richards has succeeded in turning Lit into the 'truly humanist' subject now prayed for. His influence is strong, but as usual it is the attitude which influences, more than the conclusions. 'The drift of my book everything, the words nothing,' says Whitman. Mr. Richards\* would obviously like to encourage the kind of reading which followed the precise meaning of the words – but it is his drift which really influences the Cambridge school, his attitude. It is the scientific attitude, the you-can't-catch-me attitude; in whose

tough atmosphere phrases like 'increase of individuality' are met by jolly shouts of 'define' at best, or shrugged shoulders. Richards rightly attacks the unfeeling, foggy use of capital letter words. But the drift behind his writing, the drift which an undergraduate is likely to pick up, is that the hackneyed expression of fundamental truths gives a pretty good notion of the sort of stuff these truths are made of—that, in fact, they are no good, meaningless, waste of time to talk about them. Poetry is not revelation, he suggests, and puts it by saying that it is not the 'dawn of a new twilight,' implying that 'revelation' and all that has been said of it, boils down to a hack phrase.

The question remains, is the scientific attitude, still so urgently needed in such subjects as politics or penology, the right attitude with which to approach the great English writers? And do these new improvements bring about the radical change in the subject which is necessary? Or is it merely a less superficial treatment of externals?

## THE DOOMED SUBJECT

It seems likely that, in spite of the scientific improvements, Lit is doomed. It bears no longer its early attraction of being a new, up-to-date subject. When it tries to be scientific, there are obviously other subjects which can do it much better: and it has failed to become a school of the humanities. Some kind of impetus seems to have left it. The suggestion has actually been made that it is a bad subject for youth. There is the danger, with the new type of student, that he will believe himself through with the great writers when he has got their psychopathological number. On the other side, the student in the more charming older method may be tempted too young into antiquarianism. That moment of perilous balance near the age of 22, when the young man is no longer carried along by his own tide, when the first congealing may be the final one – that is a dangerous time to meet with the implication that the past is good and fascinating *qua* past. Does any one doubt that one becomes antiquarian in the early twenties or never? ‘And beware’ (warning of Ben Jonson quoted again) ‘of letting them taste Gower and Chaucer at first, lest falling too much in love with antiquity . . .’ Dangerous for youth, also, is any encouragement of the *voyeur* attitude, the ‘stand-aside-for-genius’ atmosphere, engendered in a School

which concentrates on reading rather than on writing.

Will the time come when all the accumulated structures of Lit are deserted? Will there be made, by some shrunken and white-bearded lecturer, a last mention of the Influence of Euphuism or the First Seeds of the Romantic Revival to rows of vacant chairs, a mouse watching through a crack in the wainscot, a bluebottle shutting off its buzz to listen, the clock ticking louder and louder, and a whiff of potassium chloride drifting in through the window, with the sun, from one of the laboratories with which the lecture room is now surrounded?

Can nothing be done, in the future, with these accumulated structures, some of them supremely useful? With this accumulated knowledge? Of libraries, and how to use them. Texts, and how to construe them. Meanings of words. Bibliographies of important writers. Collations of certain texts. Fool-proof editions. Verified biographical and textual fact. Art-form antecedents of great writers. Intellectual climates of different decades – boundless accumulations of detailed, correct, and handy fact.

What will become of these? How can they be bent to a more fruitful educational purpose? Turn for guidance to the great work on education by – who? What great writer has set us a standard for educationist theory? The philosophy of education has lagged inexplicably in world thought, and even in

## THE DOOMED SUBJECT

post-renascence times it has centred round a few not quite ultimate questions such as 'vocational *vs.* humanistic,' with hows and whys left nebulous. Even the eighteenth century's view was the typical Dark Ages one of Dr. Johnson, that 'Education is as well known, and has long been as well known, as it ever can be.' There have been valuable *aperçu* from great thinkers, but educational dicta have always been scattered and contradictory. Now there is a change. Right and left there are teaching experiments, practical carryings out of subversive ideas which will form useful material on which a deductive science of education can be based, but not before the results have grown up, have matured, and can be analysed.

For the experimenters, so far, have confined themselves to children. This is the Age of Children, when children are happy, scientifically cared for, and studied above all things else. It is natural therefore that experiment in education should concentrate on the very young, and natural but not necessary that the education of the older should be left to look after itself. The child is sensitively, scientifically trained and tended – *for what?* to turn into *What?*

It seems to me that not Lit, but the subject matter on which Lit has been parasitic – the writings of expressive men – is the perfect material for this later education.

## THE MISSING SUBJECT

Now rises more distinctly into view the strange spectre of the MISSING SUBJECT – the theme which must mark the close of this book, or the opening of a new one. The Principles of . . .

Of the Art of Writing? That would be a misleading title, though it is extraordinary that outside Diploma courses in Journalism the art of writing is nowhere taught to those past the age of 18, to those, that is to say, to whom writing which is not merely imitation is for the first time becoming possible. Calligraphy is taught, and those other tools of writing, grammar and the devices of style, have been taught since the days of the quadrivium, but never Writing. We are familiarised with the instrument, but never with the use of the instrument.

A 'School of self-expression' is nearer to it perhaps – self-expression through words. It is a reminder of the astounding one-sidedness of Lit to remember that never once in the Lit world is poem or novel or whatever it is judged by the criterion of the completeness with which individuality has been expressed. Lit history is the history of Forms: but the history of self-expression is the history of emancipations from form, of escapes, like Chaucer's from the Italian, or Dostoievsky's from the English nineteenth-century novel.

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There is no School, in this country most expressive of all through the written word, of this its most highly developed art. And yet the want of it is obvious. Writers of the most entertaining and publishable letters, brilliant scientists with a gift for the popular explanation of their subject, learned and sensitive scholars, high-class novelists, just as much as business men and politicians, are barbarously dumb when it comes to the expression of their own feelings, aims, desires – of their own individuality, that is. ‘We feel,’ the politician or the preacher begins, and it is the signal, not that the core of the matter is approaching, but the skinniest platitude. The most sophisticated of the wits, the most courageously emancipated of the sociologists, the sincerest members of the church, the most beautifully dextrous surgeon or engineer – the majority of them are country bumpkins when they attempt to express in words *their own* meaning, their identity.

I believe that rightly directed the truly scientific study of Literature might prove the best means for this necessary attempt, never officially fostered, to scale this final crest of education.

If it is true that ‘Education’ (to leave out of account its slangy, bastard side-sense of ‘Learning,’ or fact-amassing) is a name given to two separate activities (1) training in self-expression and (2) training in the use of the implements through the agency of which this expression is achieved; if the suggestion of the above paragraph is true also, that modern education concentrates on (2) the imple-

ment, but neglects (1) the act of self-expression, the act of communication involved – grant these postulates, and certain gap-filling possibilities in the study of Literature suggest themselves.

Neglected as they are, the opportunities Literature gives for training in the use of the implement of writing, in the art of the use of words, is obvious. But the axiom that the study of Literature is especially suited to training in and the communication of self-knowledge, though it is often enunciated, is more difficult to explain. Consideration suggests:

1. That Painting and Music are for either the naive, or for men of advanced and humane culture. For the stage of struggling transition, of education, Literature is in some sense more concrete, shows a more direct consciousness of its own workings, and is, for the English race especially, less ambiguous.

2. The currents of the Sciences attract into channels, flow towards goals, emphasise sameness. The great writers, on the other hand, establish differences. Self-knowledge is a knowledge of difference, not of the kind which a psychologist describes, not an 'abnormality,' a blind-alley eccentricity, but a productive difference.

3. Knowledge of this kind – consciousness – is not accumulative, but progressive, and passes through an evolution of well-marked stages. It is in the work of great writers that these successive stages are most clarifyingly set forth.

Huge changes, leaving it scarcely recognisable, would have to be made in the framework and atti-

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tudes of Lit. Ang. before this latent educative power could be turned to organised use.

First, it must never again be a School of Reading-for-the-sake-of-reading. It must be Reading in order to know how to write. Writing and reading must go hand in hand. No student should read a Pope-Dryden heroic couplet satire, should study the characteristics of the Elizabethan sonnet, should 'take drama,' without himself attempting these forms, using as theme his own experience. Nor should he take notes on the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads without first elucidating what *he* thinks is the right language for poetry, or learn how to read Chaucer's *Prologue* without himself trying to describe, from their mannerism and dress, the characters of fellow-members of a bank-holiday charabanc trip. The only possible explanation of this neglect in Lit. Ang. must be Lit's vague conviction that the works of the great writer descend on him from nowhere by some kind of supernatural visitation, and that therefore composition is unanalysable.

A second change, even more foreign to present methods, is needed for the syllabus (with its Problem, described already, of How to cover the ground). Wanted (and not yet written) a diagrammatised, tabulated fact-book, giving temporal relationships, literary-form relationships, historical connections, and life facts of English authors, with graphs and lists and tables (like the table in Granville Barker and Harrison's *Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, showing productivity periods of Shakespeare's contem-

poraries), with no atom of 'good writing' fill-up, but great beauty of clear setting of type. This part of the subject – which now takes up two-thirds of the time – should be attacked *with the aim* of compressing fact, leaving the tutor's and lecturer's time clear for more essential matters, and should never be taught or rather recited by them (as it is now, half cynically, with a bad conscience, and with unhelpful suggestions that of course it would be much better if the student could have first-hand knowledge of the – 250 – authors involved).

(3) This placing of facts in their proper place, to allow for much the greater proportion of time to be spent in the concentrated study of only three or four great writers; and these writers to be chosen not for their high degree of literary virtuosity (no belletrists), nor for their far-apartness in historical time, nor for the fact that one wrote mostly in verse, another mostly in prose, and another mostly drama, but for the intensity, the completeness, with which they express each a different shape of the human spirit. Such incarnations of contrasted forms as Samuel Butler, Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats. Dr. Johnson, Browning, Bunyan. Burns, Pope, Arnold. Or even, since in them the shapes and changes are so many, Shakespeare alone, or Coleridge alone, or Blake alone.

And when to be studied, and in what order?

English Literature as material for education must be closely bound up with this question of what educative material is suitable for what periods of growth.

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At present the subject is notorious for brutally unsuitable choices. Those works so miraculously capable of bringing to the man in his thirties completer consciousness of the hard-won experience of his twenties – *Lear* and *Sartor Resartus* – are unhesitatingly prescribed for seventeen, or younger. Fact-collecting, the searching of pamphlets for the earliest appearance of the word 'its,' work which seventeen could take pleasurably and usefully in its stride, is thought proper for post-graduate days, Doctorate days.

Of the many quotable apophthegms of Dr. Whitehead on the subject of education I will choose one, from his lecture on the 'Rhythm of Education': 'Lack of attention to the rhythm and character of mental growth is a main source of wooden futility in education. . . . We must garner our crops each in its due season.'

What is certain is that the best crop to be garnered by the study of English Literature is a late one. Self-knowledge has no meaning for the adolescent. Before twenty, education is of the foetus. Granted, of course, the importance of this pre-natal care, the necessity of ensuring that the baby is not born dead. But the crucial moment begins when the young man is growing no more by his own unhinderable impetus, begins when the unthinkably compressed five-hundred-million-year-long spring of recapitulated life in his body has finished its irresistible uncoiling at last, begins when he becomes, at eighteen, at twenty, or at twenty-three, a baby individual. It is

only to this second birth that the great writers can be nurse. The first moment of this new life is most often the last. Satisfied with the first shape he happens to take, the young man believes it to be the right and only one, and congeals in that mould for ever. Or he is overcome by feelings of carefulness, he cannot bear it, he retires, he becomes a past-lover. Or he may go back to earlier, pre-natal stages, to the time when he lay under the table with the *Arabian Nights*; he may try to dwell in the realms of what he calls the 'imagination.' Or he may prefer to retire not quite so far to those days when he collected tadpoles, 'fossil child' for life, in the phrase of Aldous Huxley. Many lively ones, on the other hand, make their first break into independence with gusto and enjoyment enough, but, enchanted with the delights of this enfranchisement, they remain perpetually in this attitude of chain-breaking, for ever calling spades spades. More pleasant to live with, but less entertaining to read, are those who are frozen for ever in their enthralling moment of first æsthetic pleasure, perpetually finding the same things beautiful, fossil nineteeners.

Here re-states itself the value, for this later period of education, of English Literature. It is of the greatest importance that the baby individual of twenty-two should have his conception of the possible differences in man enlarged, that he should be able to identify himself with the writer who most nearly embodies his own time and kind of youth. Within the various wombs of his adolescence, he will have

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seen men as Dickens characters walking, embryo human characters, bad or nasty, good or nice. What is important is that he should not pass straight from the Dickens conception to the psychologist's conception, for instance, in which the Dickens characters are maintained, with different names – 'abnormal' for bad, 'normal' for good. Who can identify himself with somebody called a 'father-complex man'? Such categorisation is likely to form the you-can't-catch-me habit, a permanent common-sense attitude. But a Samuel Butler, if the young man is to be, in his first youth, a chain-breaker . . . or a Shelley, if he is to find expression as a renouncer of the body – there is a difference.

Never again the misleading and partly meaningless historical time order. The old 'Chaucer . . . Wyatt and Surrey . . . Gascoigne . . . Spenser.' Never, never, the totally arbitrary period study . . . the 'Augustans,' age of 'Dryden and Swift,' 'Pope and Johnson,' 'Dickens and Jones,' etc. Instead, writers who exemplify one or more of the successive metamorphoses and divers incarnations of Man. Early Keats and early Shakespeare – the first realisation of the objective world. Then, the strictness of the intellectual-conviction age. Coleridge in his Hartleian years, Samuel Butler, Hazlitt, Shaw. Dr. Johnson, clearing the mind of cant. And then, most neglected, what the mind is cleared of cant *for*, the knowledge of self, of motive, of the meaning of relationship, of knowledge, not as metaphysically demonstrated, but as differently experienced by indi-

viduals who have lived into this knowledge, by Blake, Wordsworth, Milton, Coleridge, Carlyle, Arnold. The order never to be by period or historical time, but always by stage of growth, corresponding to the sequences of growth in the young man: romantic writers to precede material explainers; or re-seeing of the seen to precede the re-knowing of the known which follows, which cannot come first.

Finally, at the end, no examination. No insulting one-week exam as culmination and sole test of twenty-five years' development, a memory-intelligence-fact-collecting test of fundamentally the same type as that used for engaging office-boys. There is no implication so insulting to the art as that it is possible to scribble 25,000 words in six days, under the eyes of invigilators on the look-out for cribs, with no time for re-reading, no smoking, no getting up to look out of the window – thus to scribble something which could possibly be called writing. The test should be, of course, the accumulated record, the results of the apprenticeship in writing, and the word of the teachers and tutors with whom the student has worked.

On these changes in plan would follow changes in attitude. Old categories would melt away. So many false categories are rooted in Lit, so many misunderstood distinctions, such as the great old 'Romantic and Classic.' Most of them are due to the failure to recognise the primary distinction between WRITING, a personal act, blood and tears, record of hard-

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won change, and LIT, artful construction of impersonalities.

Lit has not exactly denied this category, but it has damaged and caused to be under-valued the great authors by concentration on this second kind of writing. Presented as they were beginning to be, in the nineteenth century, no wonder Whitman could write of our great men in this way: 'the spirit of English Literature is not great . . . this literature . . . almost always congeals, makes plethoric, not frees . . . is cold, anti-democratic, loves to be sluggish and stately.'

What on earth can the Lit-fogged student make of that – or of the Lit-less Whitman's 'I will make my poems with reference not to things but to the whole'? He will not know that this is Whitman's version of the Coleridge sentence he has had to learn by heart about the importance of a 'predominating passion.' Nor how both sentences cut against Lit's subservience to the kind of writing which concentrates on the forms and on the devices, Lit's subjection to English literary fascination. (Is not the fascination of French Literature slightly preferable, more pleasingly brittle and delicate?) The peculiar merit of English writers, their ability to present the struggle for life, for integrity, is glossed over.

'Strong mystical vein,' they get: 'floundering in the sloughs of metaphysics' . . . 'an inconsistency here.' 'Strongly coloured by his ideas at the time.' . . . 'Deep in Spinoza and the Impenetrabilia of German transcendentalism.'

There will be other changes of attitude. There will be no more recommendation, I expect, to 'read in a spirit of detached criticism,' to 'keep your own point of view.' Impossible to know Shelley except by conflagration. Originality is as dependent on influence as birth on the merging of two blood streams.

Gone also will be the hard-and-fast distinction between creators and critics, the implication that writing is possible only for the God-visited few, criticism for everybody. The time may come when the remark 'I am not one of those who think that because a man has written a great poem he is therefore necessarily a great critic or theorist of poetry' is made for the last time. It is doubtful whether 'great critic' makes sense. It is a question of great man criticising, and giving validity to his opinions by placing them in the context of his self-created personality, attitude, plane of thoughts. The criticism chosen for study should be the criticism of great men, and their views on their own art.

Entirely changed, also, will be the attitude towards contemporary writers. One of the most dangerous characteristics of Lit. Ang. has been from the first a neglect or implied discouragement of the study of modern writers.

This strange situation may arise from an inability to distinguish between the novelty, the vogue, and what is really new, what really 'represents the new direction of time.' Or the explanation may be

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found in Pope's couplets,<sup>1</sup> for novelties and vogues seem to be actually preferred if they are the novelties of a hundred years ago, *Gothique*, for instance, or della cruscan.

Yet a great opportunity is missed, here. It would be valuable and possible to learn how to distinguish between those writers who succeed in expressing a new tendency, and those who are merely the shuttlecocks beaten backwards and forwards between craze and reaction.

Professor Raleigh once spoke of this. 'Landor, who had no popularity in his lifetime, was wont to say, "I shall dine late, but the dining-room will be well-lighted, the guests few and select." It is surely within the competence of a University to help him and others to dine a little earlier . . .' And yet the words were hardly out of his mouth when we were suffering a new and almost Keats-like example of public indifference to genius.

Whatever the new kind of science which rises from the ashes of Lit. Ang., it is certain that it will be Good-bye to Lit, farewell 'Lamb's sly rejoinder,' farewell 'strong lyrical vein,' adieu 'middle period of the novel of passion.' Good-bye to it, at any rate, as material for the education of the Young Man.

<sup>1</sup> He, who to seem more deep than you or I,  
Extols old bards, or Merlin's prophecy,  
Mistake him not, he envies, not admires,  
And to debase the sons, exalts the sires.

I had originally intended to illustrate this history with examples from examination papers. Want of space has forced me to exclude all but two curiosities, and some quotations from contemporary Cambridge. These—reproduced by kind permission of the University—I have purposely kept full, as I feel strongly the need of supplementing my too brief mention of that interesting progress in the career of Lit. Ang. which they represent.

APPENDIX  
EXAMINATION PAPERS

I

*The first official English paper. London University  
Matriculation 1839.*

THURSDAY, *October 10* – *Afternoon 3 to 6*

GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE OF THE ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE

*Examiner, Dr. Jerrard*

1. Into how many classes may consonants be divided in reference to the organs by which they are pronounced? Show the importance of attending to this classification. How many of the letters of the English alphabet may, for the purposes of spelling, be regarded as superfluous? How many simple vowel sounds are there, and how many distinct characters have we to represent them? How many consonants are there for which we have no proper letters? Show that in English the instances are very numerous in which the same sound is represented by different combinations of letters, and *vice versa*. Point out some of the causes and consequences of these defects in the orthography of the language.

## APPENDIX

2. What is the probable origin of the indefinite, and what of the definite article? . . .

3. Whence is derived the termination (') of the genitive case in English? . . . Are we always at liberty to join a noun of number with either a singular or plural verb?

5. Define a Verb. Explain the origin of the form of the preterite tense in English, and point out accurately its signification, distinguishing it from the Aorist. Give the preterites and perfect participles of the following verbs – ride, write, wash, sit, mow, quit, lift, hide, hold, climb. Of what verbs are *sodden* and *fraught* the participles? Mention Wallis's well-known rule for the use of *shall* and *will* in the different persons; and give a full explanation of the meanings of these verbs. Is it correct to say, 'He says he shall go,' 'Do you suppose you shall go'? Do the phrases, 'He thought he should go' and 'He thought he would go' mean the same thing? Does the line of Byron, 'I ought to do and did my best,' appear to you to contain a solecism? Would 'I ought to have done' necessarily imply that I have *not* done? Are such phrases as 'the performing a promise' inaccurate and why? What is the difference of meaning between 'I intended to write' and 'I intended to have written'?

## EXAMINATION PAPERS

MS. note to the copy of these papers in the British Museum: 'All the candidates but one scratched before the Exam, and he *withdrew* during the Exam').

### SHAKESPEARE

1. Show how the following passages may illustrate some of the changes in Shakespeare's style . . .
2. What types of drama were in favour at the time of Shakespeare's connexion with the stage, and to what extent did he accept and make use of them?
3. Analyse the plots of *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Twelfth Night*, and compare the two plays with regard to their dramatic construction.
4. Describe the sources of the text of *Romeo and Juliet* and of *Richard II*.
5. Write an essay on the character of Henry IV as represented by Shakespeare in different plays.
6. Give some account of Shakespeare's representation of Roman politics in *Julius Cæsar* and in *Coriolanus*.
7. Has the term 'Poetical Justice' any meaning applicable to the tragedy of *King Lear*?
8. Compare the *Winter's Tale* with the novel on which it is founded.
9. Write notes on the following passages . . .

### 3

*For contrast with the foregoing, two papers from the Cambridge English Tripos, 1936.*

## APPENDIX

### ENGLISH TRIPOS. PART I

---

WEDNESDAY, *May 27*, 1936. 9-12

---

ENGLISH LITERATURE, LIFE AND THOUGHT,  
1625-1798

*Group I and four other questions must be attempted, not more than two being taken from Group II and not more than two from Group III. In Groups II and III the same author should not be made the central subject of two answers.*

## II

### POETRY

2. **Either** 'If their conceits were far-fetched, they were often worth the carriage.' Consider this with reference to **three** or **four** poems, not all by the same writer.

**Or** 'If there is one thing more distinctive than another of Donne's best work it is the closeness with which the verse echoes the sense and soul of the poem.' Consider this, but do *not* confine your attention to the *Songs and Sonets*.

3. Use the following passages as a text for a short essay on 'nature poetry,' 1625-1798.

- (a) When on some gilded cloud, or flow'r  
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,  
And in those weaker glories spy  
Some shadows of eternity.

VAUGHAN.

## EXAMINATION PAPERS

(b) 'Twas but a single Rose  
Till you on it did breathe;  
But since (me thinks) it shows  
Not so much Rose as Wreathe.                      HERRICK.

(c) The Daisy, Primrose, Violet darkly blue,  
And Polyanthus of unnumbered Dyes;  
The yellow Wall-flower, stained with iron  
Brown;  
And lavish Stock that scents the Garden round:

.....  
Infinite Numbers, Delicacies, Smells,  
With Hues on Hues Expression cannot paint. . . .  
THOMSON.

(d) Books are not seldom talismans and spells,  
By which the magic art of shrewder wits  
Holds an unthinking multitude enthrall'd.  
.....  
But trees and rivulets, whose rapid course  
Defies the check of winter, haunts of deer  
And sheepwalks populous with bleating lambs,  
And lanes in which the primrose e'er her time  
Peeps through the moss that clothes the haw-  
thorne root,  
Deceive no student.                      COWPER.

4. 'A mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease.'  
Does Pope's description of the Cavalier poets seem  
to you adequate?

5. Write an introduction to a selection from  
Herrick's poems chosen by yourself.

## APPENDIX

6. **Either** (*a*) (i) 'Milton is a great master of phrase . . . the quality by which what goes before seems to necessitate and beget what comes after.'

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS.

(ii) 'But the truth is . . . he had formed his style by a perverse and pedantic principle. He was desirous to use words with a foreign idiom.'

JOHNSON.

Write an essay on Milton's poetic style taking these two views into account.

**Or** (*b*) 'The epic poem which, in its natural form is a kind of cathedral for the ideas of a nation, is by him transformed into a chapel of ease for his own mind, a monument to his own genius and his own habits of thought.' Discuss this.

7. 'The aim was not at revelation or surprise but at the satisfaction which comes from a topic perfectly covered.' With what success and by what means did Dryden achieve this aim?

8. 'Pope managed to suit very diverse thoughts and feelings to that established rhythm' (the heroic couplet). Discuss and illustrate.

9. **Either** (*a*) 'Extreme conciseness of expression, yet pure, perspicuous and musical, is one of the grand beauties of lyric poetry. This I have always aimed at, and never could attain.' Examine Gray's poetry in the light of this aim and of this sense of failure.

## EXAMINATION PAPERS

**Or** (b) 'I should conceive that Collins had a much greater poetical genius than Gray.' Discuss.

10. 'The poets are discussed as if they were monsters because they cannot help telling the truth.'

RALEIGH considering BURNS.

'Blake's strangeness . . . is merely a peculiar honesty, which, in a world too frightened to be honest, is peculiarly terrifying.'

T. S. ELIOT.

Consider **both** or **either** of these poets in relation to **both** or **either** of these statements.

## III

### PROSE AND DRAMA

11. **Either** 'In the first half of the seventeenth century English prose seems to have infinite possibilities, but no corporate sense. After the Restoration the opposite is true.' Discuss this generalisation with detailed reference to particular authors.

**Or** 'I could also have stepped into a style much higher than this in which I have here discoursed, and could have adorned all things more than here I have seemed to do, but I dare not. God did not play in convincing of me, the devil did not play in tempting of me, neither did I play when I sunk as into a bottomless pit, when the pangs of hell caught hold of me; wherefore I may not play in my relating of them, but be plain and simple, and lay down the thing as it was.'

Preface to *Grace Abounding*.

## APPENDIX

Contrast Bunyan's mode of writing with that of Sir Thomas Browne, in relation to the purpose that each of them had in mind.

12. 'The Restoration was at least as much a restoration in literature as it was in politics. It was by no means merely an invasion of ideas from France.' What is your view?

13. 'We see nothing but a set of heartless fine ladies and gentlemen coming in and coming out, saying witty things at each other, and buzzing in some maze of intrigue.' Do you see anything more than this in Restoration Comedy?

14. Swift 'would strip away the illusions that mask the faces of men.' Consider how this is done and whether it is worth doing as Swift does it.

15. 'Low living and plain thinking.' Discuss this comment on the works of Defoe.

16. 'I shall endeavour to enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality, that my Readers may, if possible, both ways find their Account in the speculation of the Day.'

*The Spectator*, No. 10.

Enlarge on the achievement of Addison in this respect.

17. What might be said in defence of Dr. Johnson's prose style?

18. In what ways was Boswell responsible for innovations in the art of biography in English?

## EXAMINATION PAPERS

19. 'The great novelists of the middle of the eighteenth century cannot be studied separately but must be seen in their rivalries to one another if they are to be fully understood.' Discuss and illustrate this remark.

20. 'The eighteenth century was one of the great ages of the English *theatre*.'

'Except for Goldsmith and Sheridan, the *drama* in this century was dead.'

Adjudicate between these two statements, or attempt a reconciliation between them if you think one is possible.

21. Discuss the use of the mediæval and the supernatural in the prose literature of the eighteenth century.

## IV

### LIFE AND THOUGHT

22. In what connection were any **four** of the following phrases used, and how characteristic were they of their authors?

(a) 'I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and seeks her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.'

(b) 'Force, and fraud, are in war the two cardinal virtues.'

## APPENDIX

(c) 'A great empire and little minds go ill together.'

(d) 'I sighed as a lover, I obeyed as a son.'

(e) 'The church of Rome defended by violence the empire which she had acquired by fraud.'

(f) 'Sir, let me tell you, the noblest prospect which a Scotchman ever sees, is the high road that leads him to England.'

23. 'For the World, I count it not an Inn, but an Hospital; and a place not to live, but to dye in.'

Comment on the depth of this feeling and its importance for literature in the first half of the seventeenth century.

24. 'In the philosophers of the seventeenth century who discuss the relation of religion to science there is a series of compromises that leave the rigorous unsatisfied.' What is your view?

25. What light is thrown by Pepys' *Diary* upon English life in the years immediately following the Restoration?

26. Compare the ideas on education of Bacon and Locke.

27. How far is it reasonable to regard Berkeley's philosophy as chiefly 'a link in the chain of reasoning connecting the empiricism of Locke with the empiricism of Hume'?

28. 'Handel was an honour to English musical hospitality, but he was a disaster to the native musical tradition.' Do you agree?

## EXAMINATION PAPERS

29. 'While the link between patronage and learning was entire, then all who deserved fame were in a capacity of attaining it. . . . Now the poet's poverty is a standing topic of contempt.'

GOLDSMITH, *An Inquiry into the  
Present State of Polite Learning.*

'At present the few poets of England no longer depend on the great for their subsistence; they have now no other patron but the public, and the public, collectively considered, is a good and generous master. . . . A writer of real merit now may easily be rich, if his heart be set only on fortune.'

GOLDSMITH, *The Citizen of the World.*

How were the circumstances of authors really affected by the gradual change from private patronage to the patronage of the general public?

30. What may be said for the opinion that Blake as a pictorial artist has more to interest us now than Reynolds and his fellow members of the Royal Academy?

31. 'Here the sons and daughters of Abyssinia lived only to know the soft vicissitudes of pleasure and repose, attended by all that were skilful to delight, and gratified with whatever the senses can enjoy. They wandered in gardens of fragrance, and slept in the fortresses of security.'

How representative of his time was the discovery of Rasselas that the real world was very unlike an earthly paradise?

## APPENDIX

### ENGLISH TRIPOS. PART II

---

MONDAY, *May* 25, 1936. 9-12

---

#### TRAGEDY

[**Four** questions should be attempted.]

1. (a) 'Tragedy represents not men but action and the unhappy element in life.' Apply this **either** to Greek tragedy in general, **or** to any **one** Greek dramatist.

**Or** (b) 'The Chorus is a deliberate sentry against realism, to forbid the illusion that we are witnessing a scene from real life.' Criticize.

2. (a) *Aeschylus*. No one can say I ever showed a woman in love.

*Euripides*. No, certainly Aphrodite gave you a wide berth.

*Aeschylus*. Yes, and I'm glad of it. But she was all over you and your characters.

What is the importance of this criticism?

**Or** (b) 'Unlike Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles do not question the justice of the gods.' Discuss, with as many illustrations as possible from their works.

3. Compare Seneca's *Phaedra* **either** with the *Hippolytus* of Euripides **or** with the *Phèdre* of Racine.

## EXAMINATION PAPERS

4. What was the medieval idea of the meaning of tragedy? How far did the Middle Ages succeed in producing anything like tragedy in the modern sense?

5. 'As scientific interest in character heightens, tragic interest almost necessarily declines.' How far do you think this true **either** of Elizabethan **or** modern tragedy?

6. 'He grew wiser as he grew older, could display life better as he knew it more, and instruct with more efficiency as he was himself more amply instructed' (JOHNSON). Consider Shakespeare's development as a tragic dramatist with reference to this statement.

7. 'Grand Guignol gilded with poetry.' Discuss this estimate of Webster.

8. **Either** (a) *Nérine*. Votre pays vous hait, votre  
époux est sans foi:  
Dans un si grand revers  
que vous reste-t-il?

*Médée*.

Moi.

Write on Corneille as an exponent of heroism.

**Or** (b) 'Le goût de Paris s'est trouvé conforme à celui d'Athènes.' Judge this summary by Racine of his dramatic experience.

**Or** (c) 'Like Descartes, like Molière, Racine moves from the general to the particular; Shakespeare on the other hand works from the complex and local to the universal.' Discuss.

## APPENDIX

9. Examine Hegel's view of the *Antigone* as a typical tragedy.

10. 'All the characters seemed to me less than life-size.' Discuss this impression of Yeats at an Ibsen performance.

11. 'Tragedy is too valuable to be allowed to die.' Write a note on the forms in which the tragic spirit survived in England during **one** of the following periods: 1660-1700, 1800-24, 1848-1914.

12. 'In the epic the pre-announced fate gradually adjusts and employs the will and incidents as its instruments (*ἔπομαι sequor*), while the drama places fate and will in opposition and is then most perfect when the victory of fate is obtained in consequence of imperfections in the opposing will, so as to leave the final impression that the fate itself is but a higher and more intelligent will.' Discuss.

13. (a) '“Virtue is knowledge” – “The virtuous are happy” – these two fundamental forms of optimism are fatal to Tragedy.' Comment.

Or (b) 'Why is it that a man loves to be saddened by the sight of tragic and disastrous things that he would shun to suffer himself?'

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